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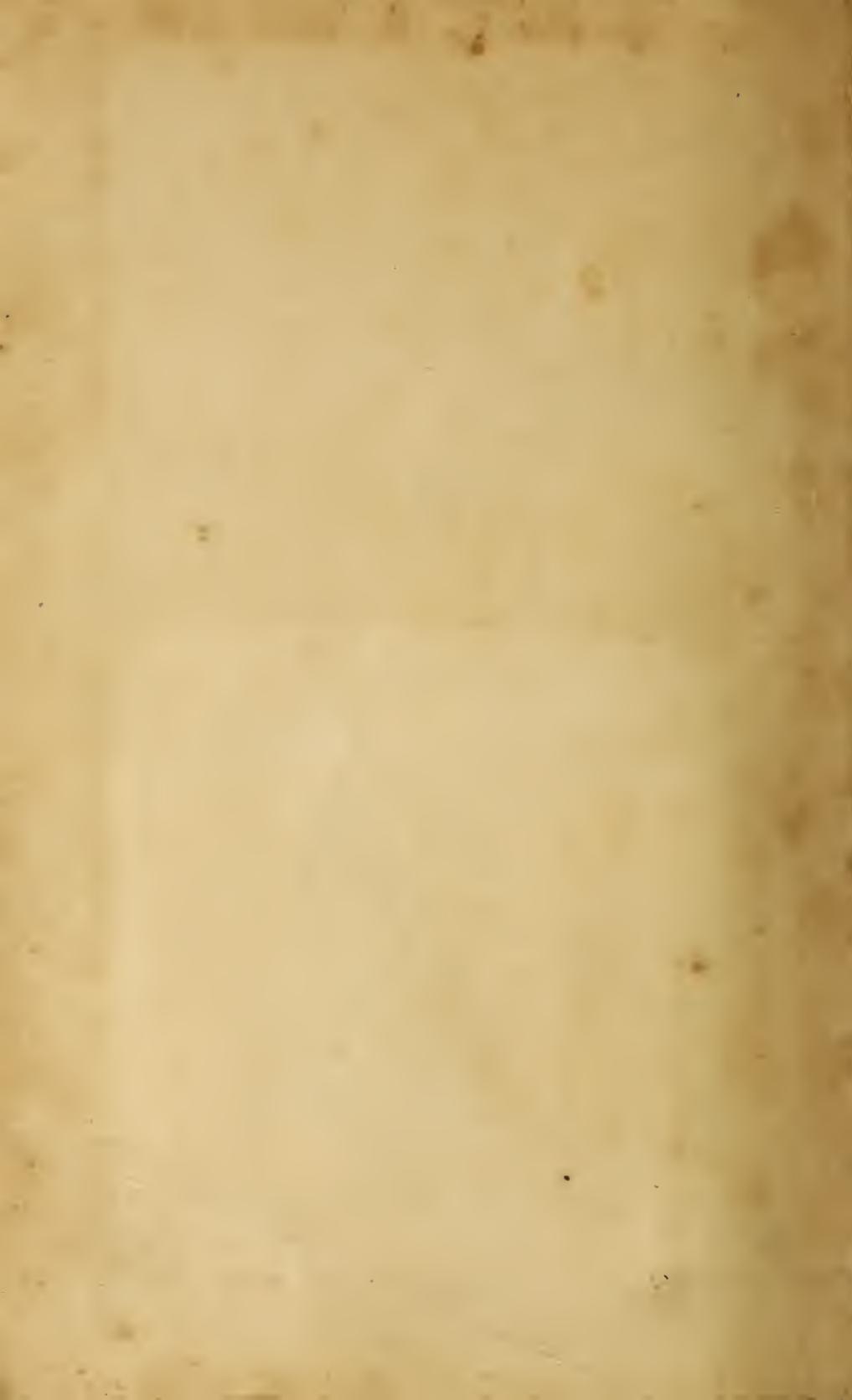


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THE BISHOP'S SECRET

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1917

By

Fergus Hume

Author of "The Mystery of a Hansom Cab," "The Silent House in Pimlico,"
"The Crimson Cryptogram," "A Traitor in London,"
"The Golden Wang-ho," etc.



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THE BISHOP'S SECRET

CHAPTER I

'ENTER MRS PANSEY AS CHORUS'

OF late years an anonymous mathematician has declared that in the British Isles the female population is seven times greater than the male; therefore, in these days is fulfilled the scriptural prophecy that seven women shall lay hold of one man and entreat to be called by his name. Miss Daisy Norsham, a veteran Belgravian spinster, decided, after some disappointing seasons, that this text was particularly applicable to London. Doubtful, therefore, of securing a husband at the rate of one chance in seven, or dissatisfied at the prospect of a seventh share in a man, she resolved upon trying her matrimonial fortunes in the country. She was plain, this lady, as she was poor; nor could she rightly be said to be in the first flush of maidenhood. In all matters other than that of man-catching she was shallow past belief. Still, she did hope, by dint of some brisk campaigning in the diocese of Beorminster, to capture a whole man unto herself.

Her first step was to wheedle an invitation out of Mrs Pansey, an archdeacon's widow—then on a philanthropic visit to town—and she arrived, towards the end of July, in the pleasant cathedral city of Beorminster, in time to attend a reception at the bishop's palace. Thus the autumn manoeuvres of Miss Norsham opened most auspiciously.

Mrs Pansey, with whom this elderly worshipper of Hymen had elected to stay during her visit, was a gruff woman, with a scowl, who 'looked all nose and eyebrows.' Few ecclesiastical matrons were so well known in the diocese of Beorminster as was Mrs Pansey; not many, it must be confessed, were so ardently hated, for there were few pies indeed in which this dear lady had not a finger; few key-holes through which her eye did not peer. Her memory and her tongue, severally and combined, had ruined half the reputations in the county. In short, she was a renowned social bully, and like most bullies she gained her ends by scaring the lives out of meeker and better-bred people than herself,

These latter feared her 'scenes' as she rejoiced in them, and as she knew the pasts of her friends from their cradle upwards, she usually contrived, by a pitiless use of her famous memory, to put to rout anyone so ill-advised as to attempt a stand against her domineering authority. When her tall, gaunt figure—inevitably arrayed in the blackest of black silks—was sighted in a room, those present either scuttled out of the way or judiciously held their peace, for everyone knew Mrs Pansey's talent for twisting the simplest observation into some evil shape calculated to get its author into trouble. She excelled in this particular method of making mischief. Possessed of ample means and ample leisure, both of these helped her materially to build up her reputation of a philanthropic bully. She literally swooped down upon the poor, taking one and all in charge to be fed, physicked, worked and guided according to her own ideas. In return for benefits conferred, she demanded an unconditional surrender of free will. Nobody was to have an opinion but Mrs Pansey; nobody knew what was good for them unless their ideas coincided with those of their patroness—which they never did. Mrs Pansey had never been a mother, yet, in her own opinion, there was nothing about children she did not know. She had not studied medicine, therefore she dubbed the doctors a pack of fools, saying she could cure where they failed. Be they tinkers, tailors, soldiers, sailors, Mrs Pansey invariably knew more about their vocations than they themselves did or were ever likely to do. In short, this celebrated lady—for her reputation was more than local—was what the American so succinctly terms a 'she-boss'; and in a less enlightened age she would indubitably have been ducked in the Beorflete river as a meddlesome, scolding, clattering jade. Indeed, had anyone been so brave as to ignore the flight of time and thus suppress her, the righteousness of the act would most assuredly have remained unquestioned.

Now, as Miss Norsham waited, for her own purposes, to 'know the ropes,' she was fortunate to come within the gloom of Mrs Pansey's silken robes. For Mrs Pansey certainly knew everyone, if she did not know

everything, and whomsoever she chaperoned had to be received by Beominster society, whether Beominster society liked it or not. All *protégées* of Mrs Pansey sheltered under the *egis* of her terrible reputation, and woe to the daring person who did not accept them as the most charming, the cleverest, and in every way the most desirable of their sex. But in the memory of man, no one had ever sustained battle against Mrs Pansey, and so this feminine Selkirk remained monarch of all she surveyed, and ruled over a community consisting mainly of canons, vicars and curates, with their respective wives and offsprings. There were times when her subjects made use of language not precisely ecclesiastic, and not infrequently Mrs Pansey's name was mentally included in the Communion Service.

Thus it chanced that Daisy, the spinster, found herself in Mrs Pansey's carriage on her way to the episcopal reception, extremely well pleased with herself, her dress, her position, and her social guardian angel. The elder lady was impressively gloomy in her usual black silk, fashioned after the early Victorian mode, when elegance invariably gave place to utility. Her headgear dated back to the later Georgian epoch. It consisted mainly of a gauze turban twinkling with jet ornaments. Her bosom was defended by a cuirass of cold-looking steel beads, finished off at the throat by a gigantic brooch, containing the portrait and hair of the late archdeacon. Her skirts were lengthy and voluminous, so that they swept the floor with a creepy rustle like the frou-frou of a brocaded spectre. She wore black silk mittens, and on either bony wrist a band of black velvet clasped with a large cameo set hideously in pale gold. Thus attired—a veritable caricature by Leech—this survival of a prehistoric age sat rigidly upright and mangled the reputations of all and sundry.

Miss Norsham, in all but age, was very modern indeed. Her neck was lean; her arms were thin. She made up for lack of quality by display of quantity. In her *décolleté* costume she appeared as if composed of bones and diamonds. The diamonds represented the bulk of Miss Norsham's wealth, and she used them not only for the adornment of her uncomely person, but for the deception of any possible suitor into the belief that she was well dowered. She affected gauzy fabrics and fluttering baby ribbons, so that her dress was as the fleecy flakes of snow clinging to a well-preserved ruin.

For the rest she had really beautiful eyes, a somewhat elastic mouth, and a straight nose well powdered to gloss over its chronic redness. Her teeth were genuine and she cultivated what society novelists term silvery peals of laughter. In every way she accentuated or obliterated nature in her efforts to render herself attractive.

Ichabod was writ large on her powdered

brow, and it needed no great foresight to foresee the speedy approach of acidulated spinsterhood. But, to do her justice, this regrettable state of single blessedness was far from being her own fault. If her good fortune had but equalled her courage and energy she should have relinquished celibacy years ago.

'Oh, dear—dear Mrs Pansey,' said the younger lady, strong in adjectives and interjections and reduplication of both, 'is the bishop very, very sweet?'

'He's sweet enough as bishops go,' growled Mrs Pansey, in her deep-toned voice. 'He might be better, and he might be worse. There is too much Popish superstition and worship of idols about him for my taste. If the departed can smell,' added the lady, with an illustrative sniff, 'the late archdeacon must turn in his grave when those priests of Baal and Dagon burn incense at the morning service. Still, Bishop Pendle has his good points, although he is a time-server and a sycophant.'

'Is he one of the Lancashire Pendles, dear Mrs Pansey?'

'A twenty-fifth cousin or thereabouts. He says he is a nearer relation, but I know much more about it than he does. If you want an ornamental bishop with good legs for gaiters, and a portly figure for an apron, Dr Pendle's the man. But as a God-fearing priest' (with a groan), 'a simple worshipper' (groan), 'and a lowly, repentant sinner' (groan), 'he leaves much—much to be desired.'

'Oh, Mrs Pansey, the dear bishop a sinner?'

'Why not?' cried Mrs Pansey, ferociously; 'aren't we all miserable sinners? Dr Pendle's a human worm, just as you are—as I am. You may dress him in lawn sleeves and a mitre, and make pagan genuflections before his throne, but he is only a worm for all that.'

'What about his wife?' asked Daisy, to avert further expansion of this text.

'A poor thing, my dear, with a dilated heart and not as much blood in her body as would fill a thimble. She ought to be in a hospital, and would be, too, if I had my way. Lolling all day long on a sofa, and taking glasses of champagne between doses of iron and extract of beef; then giving receptions and wearing herself out. How he ever came to marry the white-faced doll I can't imagine. She was a Mrs Creaght when she caught him.'

'Oh, really! a widow?'

'Of course, of course. You don't suppose she's a bigamist even though he's fool, do you?' and the eyebrows went up and down in the most alarming manner. 'The bishop—he was a London curate then—married her some eight-and-twenty years ago, and I dare-say he has repented of it ever since. They have three children—George' (with a whisk of her fan at the mention of each name),

‘who is a good-looking idiot in a line regiment ; Gabriel, a curate as white-faced as his mother, and no doubt afflicted as she is with heart trouble. He was in Whitechapel, but his father put him in a curacy here—it was sheer nepotism. Then there is Lucy ; she is the best of the bunch, which is not saying much. They’ve engaged her to young Sir Harry Brace, and now they are giving this reception to celebrate having inveigled him into the match.’

‘Engaged?’ sighed the fair Daisy, enviously. ‘Oh, do tell me if this girl is really, really pretty.’

‘Humph,’ said the eyebrows, ‘a pale, washed-out rag of a creature—but what can you expect from such a mother? No brains, no style, no conversation ; always a simpering, weak-eyed rag baby. Oh, my dear, what fools men are !’

‘Ah, you may well say that, dear Mrs Pansey,’ assented the spinster, thinking wrathfully of this unknown girl who had succeeded where she had failed. ‘Is it a very, very good match?’

‘Ten thousand a year and a fine estate, my dear. Sir Harry is a nice young fellow, but a fool. An absentee landlord, too,’ grumbled Mrs Pansey, resentfully. ‘Always running over the world poking his nose into what doesn’t concern him, like the Wandering Jew or the *Flying Dutchman*. Ah, my dear, husbands are not what they used to be. The late archdeacon never left his fireside while I was there. I knew better than to let him go to Paris or Pekin, or some of those sinks of iniquity. Cook and Gaze indeed !’ snorted Mrs Pansey, indignantly ; ‘I would abolish them by Act of Parliament. They turn men into so many Satans walking to and fro upon the earth. Oh, the immorality of these latter days ! No wonder the end of all things is predicted.’

Miss Norsham paid little attention to the latter portion of this diatribe. As Sir Harry Brace was out of the matrimonial market it conveyed no information likely to be of use to her in the coming campaign. She wished to be informed as to the number and the names of eligible men, and forewarned with regard to possible rivals.

‘And who is really and truly the most beautiful girl in Beorminster?’ she asked, abruptly.

‘Mab Arden,’ replied Mrs Pansey, promptly. ‘There, now, with an emphatic blow of her fan, ‘she is pretty, if you like, though I daresay there is more art than nature about her.’

‘Who is Mab Arden, dear Mrs Pansey?’

‘She is Miss Whichello’s niece, that’s who she is.’

‘Whichello? Oh, good gracious me ! what a very, very funny name. Is Miss Whichello a foreigner?’

‘Foreigner? Bah !’ cried Mrs Pansey, like a stentorian ram, ‘she belongs to a good

old English family, and, in my opinion, she disgraces them thoroughly. A meddlesome old maid, who wants to foist her niece on to George Pendle ; and she’s likely to succeed, too,’ added the lady, rubbing her nose with a vexed air, ‘for the young ass is in love with Mab, although she is three years older than he is. Mr Cargrim also likes the girl, though I daresay it is money with him.’

‘Really ! Mr Cargrim?’

‘Yes, he is the bishop’s chaplain ; a Jesuit in disguise I call him, with his moping and mowing and sneaky ways. Butter wouldn’t melt in his mouth ; oh, dear no ! I gave my opinion about him pretty plainly to Dr Graham, I can tell you, and Graham’s the only man with brains in this city of fools.’

‘Is Dr Graham young?’ asked Miss Norsham, in the faint hope that Mrs Pansey’s list of inhabitants might include a wealthy bachelier.

‘Young? He’s sixty, if you call that young, and in his second childhood. An Atheist, too. Tom Payn, Colonel Ingersoll, Viscount Amberly — those are his gods, the pagan ! I’d burn him on a tar-barrel if I had my way. It’s a pity we don’t stick to some customs of our ancestors.’

‘Oh, dear me, are there no young men at all?’

‘Plenty, and all idiots. Brainless officers, whose wives would have to ride on baggage-wagon ; silly young squires, whose ideal of womanhood is a brazen barmaid ; and simpering curates, put into the Church as the fools of their respective families. I don’t know what men are coming to,’ groaned Mrs Pansey. ‘The late archdeacon was clever and pious ; he honoured and obeyed me as the marriage service says a man should do. I was the light of the dear man’s eyes.’

Had Mrs Pansey stated that she had been the terror of the late archdeacon’s life she would have been vastly nearer the truth, but such a remark never occurred to her. Although she had bullied and badgered the wretched little man until he had seized the first opportunity of finding in the grave the peace denied him in life, she really and truly believed that she had been a model wife. The egotism of first person singular was so firmly ingrained in the woman that she could not conceive what a scourge she was to mankind in general ; what a trial she had been to her poor departed husband in particular. If the late Archdeacon Pansey had not died he would doubtless have become a missionary to some cannibal tribe in the South Seas, in the hope that his tough helpmate would be converted into ‘long-pig.’ But, unluckily for Beorminster, he was dead, and his relict was a mourning widow, who constantly referred to her victim as a perfect husband. And yet Mrs Pansey considered that Anthony Trollope’s celebrated Mrs Proudie was an overdrawn character.

As to Miss Norsham, she was in the depths of despair, for, if Mrs Pansey was to be believed, there was no eligible husband for her in Beorminster. It was with a heavy heart that the spinster entered the palace, and it was with the courage born of desperation that she perked up and smiled on the gay crowd she found within.

CHAPTER II

THE BISHOP IS WANTED

THE episcopal residence, situate some distance from the city, was a mediæval building, enshrined in the remnant of a royal chase, and in its perfect quiet and loneliness resembled the palace of the Sleeping Beauty. Its composite architecture was of many centuries and many styles, for bishop after bishop had pulled down portions and added others, had levelled a tower here and erected a wing there, until the result was a jumble of divers designs, incongruous but picturesque. Time had mellowed the various parts into one rich coloured whole of perfect beauty, and elevated on a green rise, surrounded by broad stone terraces, with towers and oriel and turrets and machicolated battlements; clothed with ivy, buried amid ancient trees, it looked like the realisation of a poet's dream. Only long ages and many changing epochs; only home-loving prelates, ample monies, and architects of genius, could have created so beautiful and unique a fabric. It was the admiration of transatlantic tourists with a twang; the desire of millionaires. Aladdin's industrious genii would have failed to build such a masterpiece, unless their masters had arranged to inhabit it five centuries or so after construction. Time had created it, as Time would destroy it, but at present it was in perfect preservation, and figured in steel-plate engravings as one of the stately homes of England. No wonder the mitre of Beorminster was a coveted prize, when its gainer could dwell in so noble and matchless a mansion.

As the present prelate was an up-to-date bishop, abreast of his time and fond of his creature comforts, the interior of the palace was modernised completely in accordance with the luxurious demands of nineteenth century civilisation. The stately reception-rooms—thrown open on this night to what the *Beorminster Weekly Chronicle*, strong in foreign tongues, tautologically called ‘the élite and *crème de la crème* of the diocese’—were brilliantly illuminated by electric lamps and furnished magnificently throughout, in keeping with their palatial appearance. The ceilings were painted in the Italian style, with decently-clothed Olympian deities; the floors were of parquetry, polished so highly,

and reflecting so truthfully, that the guests seemed to be walking, in some magical way, upon still water. Noble windows, extending from floor to roof, were draped with purple curtains, and stood open to the quiet moonlit world without; between these, tall mirrors flashed back gems and colours, moving figures and floods of amber radiance, and enhanced by reduplicated reflections the size of the rooms. Amid all this splendour of warmth and tints and light moved the numerous guests of the bishop. Almost every invitation had been accepted, for the receptions at the palace were on a large and liberal scale, particularly as regards eating and drinking. Dr Pendle, in addition to his official salary, possessed a handsome income, and spent it in the lavish style of a Cardinal Wolsey. He was wise enough to know how the outward and visible signs of prosperity and dignity affect the popular imagination, and frequently invited the clergy and laity to feast at the table of Mother Church, to show that she could dispense loaves and fishes with the best, and vie with Court and Society in the splendour and hospitality of her entertainments. As he approved of an imposing ritual at the cathedral, so he affected a magnificent way of living at the palace. Mrs Pansey and many others declared that Dr Pendle's aims in that direction were Romish. Perhaps they were, but he could scarcely have followed a better example, since the Church of Peter owes much of its power to a judicious employment of riches and ritual, and a dexterous gratification of the lust of the eye. The Anglican Church is more dignified now than she was in the days of the Georges, and very rightly, too, since God's ministers should not be the poorest or meanest of men.

Naturally, as the host was clerical and the building ecclesiastical, the clergy predominated at this entertainment. The bishop and the dean were the only prelates of their rank present, but there were archdeacons, and canons, and rectors, and a plentiful supply of curates, all, in their own opinion, bishops in embryo. The shape and expression of the many faces were various—ascetic, worldly, pale, red, round, thin, fat, oval; each one revealed the character of its owner. Some lean, bent forms were those of men filled with the fire of religion for its own sake; others, stout, jolly gentlemen in comfortable livings, loved the loaves and fishes of the Church as much as her precepts. The descendants of Friar Tuck and the Vicar of Bray were here, as well as those who would have been Wycliffes and Latimers had the fires of Smithfield still been alight. Obsequious curates bowed down to pompous prebendaries; blunt rectors chatted on cordial terms with suave archdeacons; and in the fold of the Church there were no black sheep on this great occasion. The shepherds and pastors of the Beorminster flock were polite, entertaining,

amusing, and not too masterful, so that the general air was quite arcadian.

The laity also formed a strong force. There were lords magnificently condescending to commoners; M.P.s who talked politics, and M.P.s who had had enough of that sort of thing at St Stephen's and didn't; hearty squires from adjacent county seats; prim bankers, with whom the said squires were anxious to be on good terms, since they were the priests of Mammon; officers from near garrison towns, gay and lighthearted, who devoted themselves to the fairer portion of the company; and a sprinkling of barristers, literary men, hardy explorers, and such like minnows among Tritons. Last, but not least, the Mayor of Beorminster was present and posed as a modern Whittington—half commercial wealth, half municipal dignity. If some envious Anarchist had exploded a dynamite bomb in the vicinity of the palace on that night, the greatest, the most intellectual, the richest people of the county would have come to an untimely end, and then the realm of England, like the people themselves, would have gone to pieces. The *Beorminster Chronicle* reporter—also present with a flimsy book and a restless little pencil—worked up this idea on the spot into a glowing paragraph.

Very ungallantly the ladies have been left to the last; but now the last shall be first, although it is difficult to do the subject justice. The matrons of surrounding parishes, the ladies of Beorminster society, the damsels of town and country, were all present in their best attire, chattering and smiling, and becking and bowing, after the observant and diplomatic ways of their sex. Such white shoulders! such pretty faces! such Parisian toilettes! such dresses of obviously home manufacture never were seen in one company. The married ladies whispered scandal behind their fans, and in a Christian spirit shot out the lip of scorn at their social enemies; the young maidens sought for marriageable men, and lurked in darkish corners for the better ensnaring of impressionable males. Cupid unseen mingled in the throng and shot his arrows right and left, not always with the best result, as many post-nuptial experiences showed. There was talk of the gentle art of needlework, of the latest bazaar and the agreeable address delivered therat by Mr Cargrim; the epicene pastime of lawn tennis was touched upon; and ardent young persons discussed how near they could go to Giant Pope's cave without getting into the clutches of its occupant. The young men talked golfing, parish work, horses, church, male millinery, polo and shooting; the young ladies chatted about Paris fashions and provincial adaptations thereof, the London season, the latest engagement, and the necessity of reviving the flirtatious game of croquet. Black coats, coloured dresses, flashing jewels, many-hued

flowers,—the restless crowd resembled a bed of gaudy tulips tossed by the wind. And all this chattering, laughing, clattering, glittering mass of well-bred, well-groomed humanity moved, and swayed, and gyrated under the white glare of the electric lamps. Urbs in Rus; Belgravia in the Provinces; Vanity Fair amid the cornfields; no wonder this entertainment of Bishop and Mrs Pendle was the event of the Beorminster year.

Like an agreeable Jupiter amid adoring mortals, the bishop, with his chaplain in attendance, moved through the rooms, bestowing a word here, a smile there, and a hearty welcome on all. A fine-looking man was the Bishop of Beorminster; as stately in appearance as any prelate drawn by Du Maurier. He was over six feet, and carried himself in a soldierly fashion, as became a leader of the Church Militant. His legs were all that could be desired to fill out episcopal gaiters; and his bland, clean-shaven face beamed with smiles and benignity. But Bishop Pendle was not the mere figure-head Mrs Pansey's malice declared him to be; he had great administrative powers, great organising capabilities, and controlled his diocese in a way which did equal credit to his heart and head. As he chatted with his guests and did the honours of the palace, he seemed to be the happiest of men, and well worthy of his exalted post. With a splendid position, a charming wife, a fine family, an obedient flock of clergy and laity, the bishop's lines were cast in pleasant places. There was not even the proverbial crumpled rose-leaf to render uncomfortable the bed he had made for himself. He was like an ecclesiastical Jacob—blessed above all men.

'Well, bishop!' said Dr Graham, a meagre sceptic, who did not believe in the endurance of human felicity, 'I congratulate you.'

'On my daughter's engagement?' asked the prelate, smiling pleasantly.

'On everything. Your position, your family, your health, your easy conscience; all is too smooth, too well with you. It can't last, your lordship, it can't last,' and the doctor shook his bald head, as no doubt Solon did at Croesus when he snubbed that too fortunate monarch.

'I am indeed blessed in the condition of life to which God has been pleased to call me.'

'No doubt! No doubt! But remember Polycrates, bishop, and throw your ring into the sea.'

'My dear Dr Graham,' said the bishop, rather stiffly, 'I do not believe in such paganism. God has blessed me beyond my deserts, no doubt, and I thank Him in all reverence for His kindly care.'

'Hum! Hum!' muttered Graham, shaking his head. 'When men thank fortune for her gifts she usually turns her back on them.'

'I am no believer in such superstitions, doctor.'

'Well, well, bishop, you have tempted the gods, let us see what they will do.'

'Gods or God, doctor?' demanded the Bishop, with magnificent displeasure.

'Whichever you like, my lord; whichever you like.'

The bishop was nettled and rather chilled by this pessimism. He felt that it was his duty as a Churchman to administer a rebuke; but Dr Graham's pagan views were well known, and a correction, however dexterously administered, would only lead to an argument. A controversy with Graham was no joke, as he was as subtle as Socrates in discovering and attacking his adversary's weak points; so, not judging the present a fitting occasion to risk a fall, the bishop smoothed away an incipient frown, and blandly smiling, moved on, followed by his chaplain. Graham looked grimly after this modern Cardinal Wolsey.

'I have never,' soliloquised the sceptic, 'I have never known a man without his skeleton. I wonder if you have one, my lord. You look cheerful, you seem thoroughly happy; but you are too fortunate. If you have not a skeleton now, I feel convinced you will have to build a cupboard for one shortly. You thank blind fortune under the alias of God? Well! well! we shall see the result of your thanks. Wolsey! Napoleon! Bismarck! they all fell when most prosperous. Hum! hum! hum!'

Dr Graham had no reason to make this speech, beyond his belief—founded upon experience—that calms are always succeeded by storms. At present the bishop stood under a serene sky; and in no quarter could Graham descry the gathering of the tempest he prophesied. But for all that he had a premonition that evil days were at hand; and, sceptic as he was, he could not shake off the uneasy feeling. His mother had been a Highland woman, and the Celt is said to be gifted with second sight. Perhaps Graham inherited the maternal gift of forecasting the future, for he glanced ominously at the stately form of his host, and shook his head. He thought the bishop was too confident of continuous sunshine.

In the meantime, Dr Pendle, quite free from such forebodings, unfortunately came within speaking distance of Mrs Pansey, who, in her bell of St Paul's voice, was talking to a group of meek listeners. Daisy Norsham had long ago seized upon Gabriel Pendle, and was chatting with him on the edge of the circle, quite heedless of her chaperon's monologue. When Mrs Pansey saw the bishop she swooped down on him before he could get out of the way, which he would have done had courtesy permitted it. Mrs Pansey was the one person Dr Pendle dreaded, and if the late archdeacon had been alive he would have encouraged the missionary project with all his heart. 'To every man his own fear.' Mrs Pansey was the bishop's.

'Bishop!' cried the lady, in her most impressive archidiaconal manner, 'about that public-house, *The Derby Winner*, it must be removed.'

Cargrim, who was deferentially smiling at his lordship's elbow, cast a swift glance at Gabriel when he heard Mrs Pansey's remark. He had a belief—founded upon spying—that Gabriel knew too much about the public-house mentioned, which was in his district; and this belief was strengthened when he saw the young man start at the sound of the name. Instinctively he kept his eyes on Gabriel's face, which looked disturbed and anxious; too much so for social requirements.

'It must be removed,' repeated the bishop, gently; 'and why, Mrs Pansey?'

'Why, bishop? You ask why? Because it is a hot-bed of vice and betting and gambling; that's why!'

'But I really cannot see—I have not the power—'

'It's near the cathedral, too,' interrupted Mrs Pansey, whose manners left much to be desired. 'Scandalous!'

'Where God erects a house of prayer,
The devil builds a chapel there.'

'Isn't it your duty to eradicate plague-spots, bishop?'

Before Dr Pendle could answer this rude question, a servant approached and spoke in a whisper to his master. The bishop looked surprised.

'A man to see me at this hour—at this time,' said he, repeating the message aloud. 'Who is he? What is his name?'

'I don't know, your lordship. He refused to give his name, but he insists upon seeing your lordship at once.'

'I can't see him!' said the bishop, sharply; 'let him call to-morrow.'

'My lord, he says it is a matter of life and death.'

Dr Pendle frowned. 'Most unbecoming language!' he murmured. 'Perhaps it may be as well to humour him. Where is he?'

'In the entrance hall, your lordship!'

'Take him into the library and say I will see him shortly. Most unusual,' said the bishop to himself. Then added aloud, 'Mrs Pansey, I am called away for a moment; pray excuse me.'

'We must talk about *The Derby Winner* later on,' said Mrs Pansey, determinedly.

'Oh, yes!—that is—really—I'll see.'

'Shall I accompany your lordship?' murmured Cargrim, officiously.

'No, Mr Cargrim, it is not necessary. I must see this man as he speaks so strongly, but I daresay he is only some pertinacious person who thinks that a bishop should be at the complete disposal of the public—the exacting public!'

With this somewhat petulant speech Dr Pendle walked away, not sorry to find an

opportunity of slipping out of a noisy argument with Mrs Pansey. That lady's parting words were that she should expect him back in ten minutes to settle the question of The Derby Winner ; or rather to hear how she intended to settle it. Cargrim, pleased at being left behind, since it gave him a chance of watching Gabriel, urged Mrs Pansey to further discussion of the question, and had the satisfaction of seeing that such discussion visibly disconcerted the curate.

And Dr Pendle? In all innocence he left the reception-rooms to speak with his untoward visitor in the library ; but although he knew it not, he was entering upon a dark and tortuous path, the end of which he was not destined to see for many a long day. Dr Graham's premonition was likely to prove true, for in the serene sky under which the bishop had moved for so long, a tempest was gathering fast. He should have taken the doctor's advice and have sacrificed his ring like Polycrates, but, as in the case of that old pagan, the gods might have tossed back the gift and pursued their relentless aims. The bishop had no thoughts like these. As yet he had no skeleton, but the man in the library was about to open a cupboard and let out its grisly tenant to haunt prosperous Bishop Pendle. To him, as to all men, evil had come at the appointed hour.

CHAPTER III

THE UNFORESEEN HAPPENS

'I FEAR,' said Cargrim, with a gentle sigh, 'I fear you are right about that public-house, Mrs Pansey.'

The chaplain made this remark to renew the discussion, and if possible bring Gabriel into verbal conflict with the lady. He had a great idea of managing people by getting them under his thumb, and so far quite deserved Mrs Pansey's epithet of a Jesuit. Of late—as Cargrim knew by a steady use of his pale blue eyes—the curate had been visiting The Derby Winner, ostensibly on parochial business connected with the ill-health of Mrs Mosk, the landlord's wife. But there was a handsome daughter of the invalid who acted as barmaid, and Gabriel was a young and inflammable man ; so, putting this and that together, the chaplain thought he discovered the germs of a scandal. Hence his interest in Mrs Pansey's proposed reforms.

'Right!' echoed the archidiaconal widow, loudly, 'of course I am right. The Derby Winner is a nest of hawks. William Mosk would have disgraced heathen Rome in its worst days ; as for his daughter—well!' Mrs Pansey threw a world of horror into the ejaculation.

'Miss Mosk is a well-conducted young

lady,' said Gabriel, growing red and injudicious.

'Lady!' bellowed Mrs Pansey, shaking her fan ; 'and since when have brazen, painted barmaids become ladies, Mr Pendle?'

'She is most attentive to her sick mother,' protested the curate, wincing.

'No doubt, sir. I presume even Jezebel had some redeeming qualities. Rubbish ! humbug ! don't tell me ! Can good come out of Nazareth?'

'Good did come out of Nazareth, Mrs Pansey.'

'That is enough, Mr Pendle ; do not pollute young ears with blasphemy. And you the son of a bishop—the curate of a parish ! Remember what is to be the portion of mockers, sir. What happened to the men who threw stones at David?'

'Oh, but really, dear Mrs Pansey, you know Mr Pendle is not throwing stones.'

'People who live in glass houses dare not, my dear. I doubt your interest in this young person, Mr Pendle. She is one who tires her head and paints her face, lying in wait for comely youths that she may destroy them. She—'

'Excuse me, Mrs Pansey !' cried Gabriel, with an angry look, 'you speak too freely and too ignorantly. The Derby Winner is a well-conducted house, for Mrs Mosk looks after it personally, and her daughter is an excellent young woman. I do not defend the father, but I hope to bring him to a sense of his errors in time. There is a charity which thinketh no evil, Mrs Pansey,' and with great heat Gabriel, forgetting his manners, walked off without taking leave of either the lady or Miss Norsham. Mrs Pansey tossed her turban and snorted, but seeing very plainly that she had gone too far, held for once her virulent tongue. Cargrim rubbed his hands and laughed softly.

'Our young friend talks warmly, Mrs Pansey. The natural chivalry of youth, my dear lady—nothing more.'

'I'll make it my business to assure myself that it is nothing more,' said Mrs Pansey, in low tones. 'I fear very much that the misguided young man has fallen into the lures of this daughter of Heth. Do you know anything about her, Mr Cargrim ?'

Too wise to commit himself to speech, the chaplain cast up his pale eyes and looked volumes. This was quite enough for Mrs Pansey ; she scented evil like a social vulture, and taking Cargrim's arm dragged him away to find out all the bad she could about The Derby Winner and its too attractive barmaid.

Left to herself, Miss Norsham seized upon Dean Alder, to whom she had been lately introduced, and played with the artillery of her eyes on that unattractive churchman. Mr Dean was old and wizen, but he was unmarried and rich, so Miss Norsham thought it might be worth her while to play Vivien

to this clerical Merlin. His weak point,—speedily discovered,—was archaeology, and she was soon listening to a dry description of his researches into Beorminster municipal chronicles. But it was desperately hard work to fix her attention.

'Beorminster,' explained the pedantic dean, not unmoved by his listener's artificial charms, 'is derived from two Anglo-Saxon words—Bœr a hill, and mynster the church of a monastery. Anciently, our city was called Bœorhmynster, "the church of the hill," for, as you can see, my dear young lady, our cathedral is built on the top of a considerable rise, and thence gained its name. The townsfolk were formerly vassals, and even serfs, of the monastery which was destroyed by Henry VIII.; but the Reformation brought about by that king put an end to the abbot's power. The head of the Bœorhmynster monastery was a mitred abbot—'

'And Bishop Pendle is a mitred bishop,' interposed the fair Daisy, to show the quickness of her understanding, and thereby displaying her ignorance.

'All bishops are mitred,' said Dr Alder, testily; 'a crozier and a mitre are the symbols of their high office. But the Romish abbots of Bœorhmynster were not bishops although they were mitred prelates.'

'Oh, how very, very amusing,' cried Daisy, suppressing a yawn. 'And the name of the river, dear Mr. Dean? Does Beorflete mean the church of the hill too?'

'Certainly not, Miss Norsham. "Flete," formerly "fleot," is a Scandinavian word and signifies "a flood," "a stream," "a channel." Bœorhfleot, or — as we now erroneously call it—Beorflete, means, in the vulgar tongue, the flood or stream of the hill. Even in Normandy the word *fleot* has been corrupted, for the town now called *Havfleur* was formerly correctly designated "Havflete." But I am afraid you find this information dull, Miss Norsham!'

This last remark was occasioned by Daisy yawning. It is true that she held a fan, and had politely hidden her mouth when yawning; unfortunately, the fan was of transparent material, and Daisy quite forgot that Mr. Dean could see the yawn, which he certainly did. In some confusion she extricated herself from an awkward situation by protesting that she was not tired but hungry, and suggested that Dr. Alder should continue his instructive conversation at supper. Mollified by this dexterous evasion, which he saw no reason to disbelieve, the dean politely escorted his companion to the regions of champagne and chicken, both of which aided the lady to sustain further doses of dry-as-dust facts dug out of a monastic past by the persevering Dr. Alder. It was in this artful fashion that the town mouse strove to ensnare the church mouse, and succeeded so well that when Mr. Dean went home to his lonely house he con-

cluded that it was just as well the monastic institution of celibacy had been abolished.

On leaving Mrs. Pansey in disgust, Gabriel proceeded with considerable heat into the next room, where his mother held her court as hostess. Mrs. Pendle was a pale, slight, small-framed woman with golden hair, languid eyes, and a languid manner. Owing to her delicate health she could not stand for any length of time, and therefore occupied a large and comfortable arm-chair. Her daughter Lucy, who resembled her closely in looks, but who had more colour in her face, stood near at hand talking to her lover. Both ladies were dressed in white silk, with few ornaments, and looked more like sisters than mother and daughter. Certainly Mrs. Pendle appeared surprisingly young to be the parent of a grown-up family, but her continuance of youth was not due to art, as Mrs. Pansey averred, but to the quiet and undisturbed life which her frail health compelled her to lead. The bishop was tenderly attached to her, and even at this late stage of their married life behaved towards her more like a lover than a husband. He warded off all worries and troubles from her; he surrounded her with pleasant people, and made her life luxurious and peaceful by every means obtainable in the way of money and influence. It was no wonder that Mrs. Pendle, treading the Primrose Path with a devoted and congenial companion, appeared still young. She looked as fair and fragile as a peri, and as free from mortal cares.

'Is that you, Gabriel?' she said in a low, soft voice, smiling gently on her younger and favourite son. 'You look disturbed, my dear boy!'

'Mrs. Pansey!' said Gabriel, and considering that the name furnished all necessary information, sat down near his mother and took one of her delicate hands in his own to smooth and fondle.

'Oh, indeed! Mrs. Pansey!' echoed the bishop's wife, smiling still more; and with a slight shrug cast an amused look at Lucy, who in her turn caught Sir Harry's merry eyes and laughed outright.

'Old catamaran!' said Brace, loudly.

'Oh, Harry! Hush!' interposed Lucy, with an anxious glance. 'You shouldn't.'

'Why not? But for the present company I would say something much stronger.'

'I wish you would,' said Gabriel, easing his stiff collar with one finger; 'my cloth forbids me to abuse Mrs. Pansey properly.'

'What has she been doing now, Gabriel?'

'Ordering the bishop to have The Derby Winner removed, mother.'

'The Derby Winner,' repeated Mrs. Pendle, in puzzled tones; 'is that a horse?'

'A public-house, mother; it is in my district, and I have been lately visiting the wife of the landlord, who is very ill. Mrs. Pansey wants the house closed and the woman turned out

into the streets, so far as I can make out !'

'The Derby Winner is my property,' said Sir Harry, blusly, 'and it shan't be shut up for a dozen Mrs Panseys.'

'Think of a dozen Mrs Panseys,' murmured Lucy, pensively.

'Think of Bedlam and Pandemonium, my dear ! Thank goodness Mrs Pansey is the sole specimen of her kind. Nature broke the mould when that clacking nuisance was turned out. She—'

'Harry ! you really must not speak so loud. Mrs Pansey might hear. Come with me, dear. I must look after our guests, for I am sure mother is tired.'

'I am tired,' assented Mrs Pendle, with a faint sigh. 'Thank you, Lucy, I willingly make you my representative. Gabriel will stay beside me.'

'Here is Miss Tancred,' observed Harry Brace, in an undertone.

'Oh, she must not come near mother,' whispered Lucy, in alarm. 'Take her to the supper-room, Harry.'

'But she'll tell me the story of how she lost her purse at the Army and Navy Stores, Lucy.'

'You can bear hearing it better than mother can. Besides, she'll not finish it ; she never does.'

Sir Harry groaned, but like an obedient lover intercepted a withered old dame who was the greatest bore in the town. She usually told a digressive story about a lost purse, but hitherto had never succeeded in getting to the point, if there was one. Accepting the suggestion of supper with alacrity, she drifted away on Sir Harry's arm, and no doubt mentioned the famous purse before he managed to fill her mouth and stop her proosing.

Lucy, who had a quiet humour of her own in spite of her demure looks, laughed at the dejection and martyrdom of Sir Harry ; and taking the eagerly-proffered arm of a callow lieutenant, ostentatiously and hopelessly in love with her, went away to play her part of deputy hostess. She moved from group to group, and everywhere received smiles and congratulations, for she was a general favourite, and, with the exception of Mrs Pansey, everyone approved of her engagement. Behind a floral screen a band of musicians, who called themselves the Yellow Hungarians, and individually possessed the most unpronounceable names, played the last waltz, a smooth, swinging melody which made the younger guests long for a dance. In fact, the callow lieutenant boldly suggested that a waltz should be attempted, with himself and Lucy to set the example ; but his companion snubbed him unmercifully for his boldness, and afterwards restored his spirits by taking him to the supper-room. Here they found Miss Tancred in the full flow of her purse story ; so Lucy, having pity on her lover, bestowed her escort on the

old lady as a listener, and enjoyed supper at an isolated table with Sir Harry. The sucking Wellington could have murdered Brace with pleasure, and very nearly did murder Miss Tancred, for he plied her so constantly with delicacies that she got indigestion, and was thereby unable to finish about the purse.

Gabriel and his mother were not long left alone, for shortly there approached a brisk old lady, daintily dressed, who looked like a fairy godmother. She had a keen face, bright eyes like those of a squirrel, and in gesture and walk and glance was as restless as that animal. This piece of alacrity was Miss Whichello, who was the aunt of Mab Arden, the beloved of George Pendle. Mab was with her, and, gracious and tall, looked as majestic as any queen, as she paced in her stately manner by the old lady's side. Her beauty was that of Juno, for she was imperial and a trifle haughty in her manner. With dark hair, dark eyes, and dark complexion, she looked like an Oriental princess, quite different in appearance to her apple-cheeked, silvery-haired aunt. There was something Jewish about her rich, eastern beauty, and she might have been painted in her yellow dress as Esther or Rebecca, or even as Jael who slew Sisera on the going down of the sun.

'Well, good folks,' said the brisk little lady in a brisk little voice, 'and how are you both ? Tired, Mrs Pendle ?' Of course, what else can you expect with late hours and your delicacies. I don't believe in these social gatherings.'

'Your presence here contradicts that assertion,' said Gabriel, giving up his chair.

'Oh, I am a martyr to duty. I came because Mab must be amused !'

'I only hope she is not disappointed,' said Mrs Pendle, kindly, for she knew how things were between her eldest son and the girl. 'I am sorry George is not here, my dear.'

'I did not expect him to be,' replied Mab, in her grave, contralto voice, and with a blush ; 'he told me that he would not be able to get leave from his colonel.'

'Ha ! his colonel knows what is good for young men,' cried Miss Whichello ; 'work and diet both in moderate quantities. My dear Mrs Pendle, if you only saw those people in the supper-room !—simply digging their graves with their teeth. I pity the majority of them to-morrow morning.'

'Have you had supper, Miss Whichello ?' asked Gabriel.

'Oh, yes ! a biscuit and a glass of weak whisky and water ; quite enough, too. Mab here has been drinking champagne recklessly.'

'Only half a glass, aunt ; don't take away my character !'

'My dear, if you take half a glass, you may as well finish the bottle for the harm it does you. Champagne is poison ; much or little, it is rank poison.'

'Come away, Miss Arden, and let us poison ourselves,' suggested the curate.

'It wouldn't do you any harm, Mrs Pendle,' cried the little old lady. 'You are too pale, and champagne, in your case, would pick you up. Iron and slight stimulants are what *you* need. I am afraid you are not careful what you eat.'

'I am not a dietitian, Miss Whichello.'

'I am, my dear ma'am; and look at me—sixty-two, and as brisk as a bee. I don't know the meaning of the word illness. In a good hour be it spoken,' added Miss Whichello, thinking she was tempting the gods. 'By the way, what is this about his lordship being ill?'

'The bishop ill!' faltered Mrs Pendle, half rising. 'He was perfectly well when I saw him last. Oh, dear me, what is this?'

'He's ill now, in the library, at all events.'

'Wait, mother,' said Gabriel, hastily. 'I will see my father. Don't rise; don't worry yourself; pray be calm.'

Gabriel walked quickly to the library, rather astonished to hear that his father was indisposed, for the bishop had never had a day's illness in his life. He saw by the demeanour of the guests that the indisposition of their host was known, for already an uneasy feeling prevailed, and several people were departing. The door of the library was closed and locked. Cargrim was standing sentinel beside it, evidently irate at being excluded.

'You can't go in, Pendle,' said the chaplain, quickly. 'Dr Graham is with his lordship.'

'Is this sudden illness serious?'

'I don't know. His lordship refuses to see anyone but the doctor. He won't even admit me,' said Cargrim, in an injured tone.

'What has caused it?' asked Gabriel, in dismay.

'I don't know!' replied Cargrim, a second time. 'His lordship saw some stranger who departed ten minutes ago. Then he sent for Dr Graham! I presume this stranger is responsible for the bishop's illness.'

CHAPTER IV

THE CURIOSITY OF MR CARGRIM

LIKE that famous banquet, when Macbeth entertained unawares the ghost of gracious Duncan, the bishop's reception broke up in the most admired disorder. It was not Dr Pendle's wish that the entertainment should be cut short on his account, but the rumour—magnified greatly—of his sudden illness so dispirited his guests that they made haste to depart; and within an hour the palace was emptied of all save its usual inhabitants. Dr Graham in attendance on the bishop was the only stranger who remained, for Lucy sent away even Sir Harry, although he begged hard to stay in the hope of making himself useful. And the most unpleasant part of the whole incident was, that no one seemed to know the

reason of Bishop Pendle's unexpected indisposition.

'He was quite well when I saw him last,' repeated poor Mrs Pendle over and over again. 'And I never knew him to be ill before. What does it all mean?'

'Perhaps papa's visitor brought him bad news,' suggested Lucy, who was hovering round her mother with smelling-salts and a fan.

Mrs Pendle shook her head in much distress. 'Your father has no secrets from me,' she said decisively, 'and, from all I know, it is impossible that any news can have upset him so much.'

'Dr Graham may be able to explain,' said Gabriel.

'I don't want Dr Graham's explanation,' whimpered Mrs Pendle, tearfully. 'I dislike all things to hear from a stranger what should be told to myself. As your father's wife, he has no right to shut me out of his confidence—and the library,' finished Mrs Pendle, with an aggrieved after-thought.

Certainly the bishop's conduct was very strange, and would have upset even a less nervous woman than Mrs Pendle. Neither of her children could comfort her in any way, for, ignorant themselves of what had occurred, they could make no suggestions. Fortunately, at this moment, Dr Graham, with a reassuring smile on his face, made his appearance, and proceeded to set their minds at ease.

'Tut! tut! my dear lady!' he said briskly, advancing on Mrs Pendle, 'what is all this?'

'The bishop—'

'The bishop is suffering from a slight indisposition brought on by too much exertion in entertaining. He will be all right to-morrow.'

'This visitor has had nothing to do with papa's illness, then?'

'No, Miss Lucy. The visitor was only a decayed clergyman in search of help.'

'Cannot I see my husband?' was the anxious question of the bishop's wife.

Graham shrugged his shoulders, and looked doubtfully at the poor lady. 'Better not, Mrs Pendle,' he said judiciously. 'I have given him a soothing draught, and now he is about to lie down. There is no occasion for you to worry in the least. To-morrow morning you will be laughing over this needless alarm. I suggest that you should go to bed and take a stiff dose of valerian to soothe those shaky nerves of yours. Miss Lucy will see to that.'

'I should like to see the bishop,' persisted Mrs Pendle, whose instinct told her that the doctor was deceiving her.

'Well! well!' said he, good-humouredly, 'a wilful woman will have her own way. I know you won't sleep a wink unless your mind is set at rest, so you *shall* see the bishop. Take my arm, please.'

'I can walk by myself, thank you!' replied Mrs Pendle, testily; and nerved to unusual exertion by anxiety, she walked towards the

library, followed by the bishop's family and his chaplain, which latter watched this scene with close attention.

'She'll collapse after this,' said Dr Graham, in an undertone to Lucy; 'you'll have a wakeful night, I fear.'

'I don't mind that, doctor, so long as there is no real cause for alarm.'

'I give you my word of honour, Miss Lucy, that this is a case of much ado about nothing.'

'Let us hope that such is the case,' said Cargrim, the Jesuit, in his softest tones, whereupon Graham looked at him with a pronounced expression of dislike.

'As a man, I don't tell lies; as a doctor, I never make false reports,' said he, coldly; 'there is no need for your pious hopes, Mr Cargrim.'

The bishop was seated at his desk scribbling idly on his blotting-pad, and rose to his feet with a look of alarm when his wife and family entered. His usually ruddy colour had disappeared, and he was white-faced and haggard in appearance; looking like a man who had received a severe shock, and who had not yet recovered from it. On seeing his wife, he smiled reassuringly, but with an obvious effort, and hastened to conduct her to the chair he had vacated.

'Now, my dear,' he said, when she was seated, 'this will never do.'

'I am so anxious, George!'

'There is no need to be anxious,' retorted the bishop, in reproofing tones. 'I have been doing too much work of late, and unexpectedly I was seized with a faintness. Graham's medicine and a night's rest will restore me to my usual strength.'

'It's not your heart, I trust, George?'

'His heart!' jested the doctor. 'His lordship's heart is as sound as his digestion.'

'We thought you might have been upset by bad news, papa.'

'I have had no bad news, Lucy. I am only a trifle overcome by late hours and fatigue. Take your mother to bed; and you, my dear,' added the bishop, kissing his wife, 'don't worry yourself unnecessarily. Good-night, and good sleep.'

'Some valerian for your nerves, bishop—'

'I have taken something for my nerves, Amy. Rest is all I need just now.'

Thus reassured, Mrs Pendle submitted to be led from the library by Lucy. She was followed by Gabriel, who was now quite easy in his mind about his father. Cargrim and Graham remained, but the bishop, taking no notice of their presence, looked at the door through which his wife and children had vanished, and uttered a sound something between a sigh and a groan.

Dr Graham looked anxiously at him, and the look was intercepted by Cargrim, who at once made up his mind that there was something seriously wrong, which both Graham and the bishop desired to conceal. The doctor

noted the curious expression in the chaplain's eyes, and with bluff good-humour—which was assumed, as he disliked the man—proceeded to turn him out of the library. Cargrim—bent on discovering the truth—protested, in his usual cat-like way, against this sudden dismissal.

'I should be happy to sit up all night with his lordship,' he declared.

'Sit up with your grandmother!' cried Graham, gruffly. 'Go to bed, sir, and don't make mountains out of molehills.'

'Good-night, my lord,' said Cargrim, softly. 'I trust you will find yourself fully restored in the morning.'

'Thank you, Mr Cargrim; good-night!'

When the chaplain sidled out of the room, Dr Graham rubbed his hands and turned briskly towards his patient, who was standing as still as any stone, staring in a hypnotised sort of way at the reading lamp on the desk.

'Come, my lord,' said he, touching the bishop on the shoulder, 'you must take your composing draught and get to bed. You'll be all right in the morning.'

'I trust so!' replied Pendle, with a groan.

'Of course, bishop, if you won't tell me what is the matter with you, I can't cure you.'

'I am upset, doctor, that is all.'

'You have had a severe nervous shock,' said Graham, sharply, 'and it will take some time for you to recover from it. This visitor brought you bad news, I suppose?'

'No!' said the bishop, wincing, 'he did not.'

'Well! well! keep your own secrets. I can do no more, so I'll say good-night,' and he held out his hand.

Dr Pendle took it and retained it within his own for a moment. 'Your allusion to the ring of Polycrates, Graham!'

'What of it?'

'I should throw my ring into the sea also. That is all.'

'Ha! ha! You'll have to travel a considerable distance to reach the sea, bishop. Good-night; good-night,' and Graham, smiling in his dry way, took himself out of the room. As he glanced back at the door he saw that the bishop was again staring dully at the reading lamp. Graham shook his head at the sight, and closed the door.

'It is mind, not matter,' he thought, as he put on hat and coat in the hall; 'the cupboard's open and the skeleton is out. My premonition was true—true. Æsculapius forgive me that I should be so superstitious. The bishop has had a shock. What is it? what is it? That visitor brought bad news! Hum! Hum! Better to throw physic to the dogs in his case. Mind diseased: secret trouble: my punishment is greater than I can bear. Put this and that together; there is something serious the matter. Well! well! I'm no Paul Pry.'

'Is his lordship better?' said the soft voice of Cargrim at his elbow.

Graham wheeled round. 'Much better; good-night,' he replied curtly, and was off in a moment.

Michael Cargrim, the chaplain, was a dangerous man. He was thin and pale, with light blue eyes and sleek fair hair; and as weak physically as he was strong mentally. In his neat clerical garb, with a slight stoop and meek smile, he looked a harmless, commonplace young curate of the tabby cat kind. No one could be more tactful and ingratiating than Mr Cargrim, and he was greatly admired by the old ladies and young girls of Beorminster; but the men, one and all—even his clerical brethren—disliked and distrusted him, although there was no apparent reason for their doing so. Perhaps his too deferential manners and pronounced effeminity, which made him shun manly sports, had something to do with his masculine unpopularity; but, from the bishop downward, he was certainly no favourite, and in every male breast he constantly inspired a desire to kick him. The clergy of the diocese maintained towards him a kind of 'Dr Fell' attitude, and none of them had more to do with him than they could help. With all the will in the world, with all the desire to interpret brotherly love in its most liberal sense, the Beorminster Levites found it impossible to like Mr Cargrim. Hence he was a kind of clerical Ishmael, and as dangerous within as he looked harmless without.

How such a viper came to warm itself on the bishop's hearth no one could say. Mrs Pansey herself did not know in what particular way Mr Cargrim had wriggled himself—so she expressed it—into his present snug position. But, to speak frankly, there was no wriggling in the matter, and had the bishop felt himself called upon to explain his business to anyone, he could have given a very reasonable account of the election of Cargrim to the post of chaplain. The young man was the son of an old schoolfellow, to whom Pendle had been much attached, and from whom, in the earlier part of his career, he had received many kindnesses. This schoolfellow—he was a banker—had become a bankrupt, a beggar, finally a suicide, through no fault of his own, and when dying, had commended his wife and son to the bishop's care. Cargrim was then fifteen years of age, and being clever and calculating, even as a youth, had determined to utilise the bishop's affection for his father to its fullest extent. He was clever, as has been stated; he was also ambitious and unscrupulous; therefore he resolved to enter the profession in which Dr Pendle's influence would be of most value. For this reason, and not because he felt a call to the work, he entered holy orders. The result of his wisdom was soon apparent, for after a short career as a curate in London, he was appointed chaplain to the Bishop of Beorminster.

So far, so good. The position, for a young

man of twenty-eight, was by no means a bad one; the more so as it gave him a capital opportunity of gaining a better one by watching for the vacancy of a rich preferment and getting it from his patron by asking directly and immediately for it. Cargrim had in his eye the rectorship of a wealthy, easy-going parish, not far from Beorminster, which was in the gift of the bishop. The present holder was aged and infirm, and given so much to indulgence in port wine, that the chances were he might expire within a few months, and then, as the chaplain hoped, the next rector would be the Reverend Michael Cargrim. Once that firm position was obtained, he could bend his energies to developing into an archdeacon, a dean, even into a bishop, should his craft and fortune serve him as he intended they should. But in all these ambitious dreams there was nothing of religion, or of conscience, or of self-denial. If ever there was a square peg which tried to adapt itself to a round hole, Michael Cargrim, allegorically speaking, was that article.

With all his love for the father, Dr Pendle could never bring himself to like the son, and determined in his own mind to confer a benefice on him when possible, if only to get rid of him; but not the rich one of Heathcroft, which was the delectable land of Cargrim's desire. The bishop intended to bestow that on Gabriel; and Cargrim, in his sneaky way, had gained some inkling of this intention. Afraid of losing his wished-for prize, he was bent upon forcing Dr Pendle into presenting him with the living of Heathcroft; and to accomplish this amiable purpose with the more certainty he had conceived the plan of somehow getting the bishop into his power. Hitherto—so open and stainless was Dr Pendle's life—he had not succeeded in his aims; but now matters looked more promising, for the bishop appeared to possess a secret which he guarded even from the knowledge of his wife. What this secret might be, Cargrim could not guess, in spite of his anxiety to do so, but he intended in one way or another to discover it and utilise it for the furtherance and attainment of his own selfish ends. By gaining such forbidden knowledge he hoped to get Dr Pendle well under his thumb; and once there the prelate could be kept in that uncomfortable position until he gratified Mr Cargrim's ambition. For a humble chaplain to have the whip-hand of a powerful ecclesiastic was a glorious and easy way for a meritorious young man to succeed in his profession. Having come to this conclusion, which did more credit to his head than to his heart, Cargrim sought out the servant who had summoned the bishop to see the stranger. A full acquaintance with the circumstances of the visit was necessary to the development of the Reverend Michael's ingenious little plot.

'This is a sad thing about his lordship's indisposition,' said he to the man in the most

casual way, for it would not do to let the servant know that he was being questioned for a doubtful purpose.

'Yes, sir,' replied the man. "'Tis mos' extraordinary. I never knowed his lordship took ill before. I suppose that gentleman brought bad news, sir.'

'Possibly, John, possibly. Was this gentleman a short man with light hair? I fancy I saw him.'

'Lor', no, Mr Cargrim. He was tall and lean as a rake; looked like a military gentleman, sir; and I don't know as I'd call him gentry either,' added John, half to himself. 'He wasn't what he thought he was.'

'A decayed clergyman, John?' inquired Cargrim, remembering Graham's description.

'There was lots of decay but no clergy about him, sir. I fancy I knows a parson when I sees one. Clergymen don't have scars on their cheekses as I knows of.'

'Oh, indeed!' said Cargrim, mentally noting that the doctor had spoken falsely. 'So he had a scar?'

'A red scar, sir, on the right cheek, from his temple to the corner of his mouth. He was as dark as pitch in looks, with a military moustache, and two black eyes like gimblets. His clothes was shabby, and his looks was horrid. Bad-tempered too, sir, I should say, for when he was with his lordship I 'eard his voice quite angry like. It ain't no clergy as 'ud speak like that to our bishop, Mr Cargrim.'

'And his lordship was taken ill when this visitor departed, John?'

'Right off, sir. When I got back to the library after showing him out I found his lordship gas'ly pale.'

'And his paleness was caused by the noisy conduct of this man?'

'Couldn't have bin caused by anything else, sir.'

'Dear me! dear me! this is much to be deplored,' sighed Cargrim, in his softest manner. 'And a clergyman too.'

'Beggin' your pardon, sir, he weren't no clergyman,' cried John, who was an old servant and took liberties; 'he was more like a tramp or a gipsy. I wouldn't have left him near the plate, I know.'

'We must not judge too harshly, John. Perhaps this poor man was in trouble.'

'He didn't look like it, Mr Cargrim. He went in and came out quite cocky like. I wonder his lordship didn't send for the police.'

'His lordship is too kind-hearted, John. This stranger had a scar, you say?'

'Yes, sir; a red scar on the right cheek.'

'Dear me! no doubt he has been in the wars. Good-night, John. Let us hope that his lordship will be better after a night's rest.'

'Good-night, sir!'

The chaplain walked away with a satisfied smile on his meek face.

'I must find the man with the scar,' he thought, 'and then—who knows?'

CHAPTER V

THE DERBY WINNER

As its name denotes, Beorminster was built on a hill, or, to speak more precisely, on an eminence elevated slightly above the surrounding plain. In former times it had been surrounded by aguish marshes which had rendered the town unhealthy, but now that modern enterprise had drained the fenlands, Beorminster was as salubrious a town as could be found in England. The rich, black mud of the former bogs now yielded luxuriant harvests, and in autumn the city, with its mass of red-roofed houses climbing upward to the cathedral, was islanded in a golden ocean of wheat and rye and bearded barley. For the purposes of defence, the town had been built originally on the slopes of the hill, under the very shadow of the minster, and round its base the massive old walls yet remained, which had squeezed the city into a huddled mass of uncomfortable dwellings within its narrow girdle. But now oppidan life extended beyond these walls; and houses, streets, villas and gardens spread into the plain on all sides. Broad, white roads ran to Southberry Junction, ten miles away; to manufacturing Irongrip, the smoke of whose furnaces could be seen on the horizon; and to many a tiny hamlet and sleepy town buried amid the rich meadowlands and golden corn-fields. And high above all lorded the stately cathedral, with its trio of mighty towers, whence, morning and evening, melodious bells pealed through the peaceful lands.

Beyond the walls the modern town was made up of broad streets and handsome shops. On its outskirts appeared comfortable villas and stately manors, gardens and woody parks, in which dwelt the aristocracy of Beorminster. But the old town, with its tall houses and narrow lanes, was given over to the plebeians, save in the Cathedral Close, where dwelt the canons, the dean, the archdeacon, and a few old-fashioned folk who remained by preference in their ancestral dwellings. From this close, which surrounded the open space, wherein the cathedral was built, narrow streets trickled down to the walls, and here was the Seven Dials, the Whitechapel, the very worst corner of Beorminster. The Beorminster police declared that this network of lanes and alleys and malodorous *cul-de-sacs* was as dangerous a neighbourhood as any London slum, and they were particularly emphatic in denouncing the public-house known as The Derby Winner, and kept by a certain William Mosk, who

was a sporting scoundrel and a horsey scamp. This ill-famed hostel was placed at the foot of the hill, in what had once been the main street, and being near the Eastgate, caught in its web most of the thirsty passers-by who entered the city proper, either for sight-seeing or business. It affected a kind of spurious respectability, which was all on the outside, for within it was as iniquitous a den as could well be conceived, and was usually filled with horse-copers and sporting characters, who made bets, and talked racing, and rode or drove fiery steeds, and who lived on, and swindled through, the noblest of all animals. Mr Mosk, a lean light-weight, who wore loud check suits, tight in the legs and short in the waist, was the presiding deity of this *Inferno*, and as the *Ormuz* to this *Ahriman*, Gabriel Pendle was the curate of the district, charged with the almost hopeless task of reforming his sporting parishioners. And all this, with considerable irony, was placed almost in the shadow of the cathedral towers.

Not a neighbourhood for Mr Cargrim to venture into, since many sights therein must have displeased his exact tastes; yet two days after the reception at the palace the chaplain might have been seen daintily picking his way over the cobble-stone pavements. As he walked he thought, and his thoughts were busy with the circumstances which had led him to venture his saintly person so near the spider's web of *The Derby Winner*. The bishop, London, curiosity, Gabriel, this unpleasant neighbourhood—so ran the links of his chain of thought.

The day following his unexpected illness brought no relief to the bishop, at all events to outward seeming, for he was paler and more haggard than ever in looks, and as dour as a bear in manner. With Mrs Pendle he strove to be his usual cheerful self, but with small success, as occasionally he would steal an anxious look at her, and heave deep sighs expressive of much inward trouble. All this was noted by Cargrim, who carefully strove, by sympathetic looks and dexterous remarks, to bring his superior to the much-desired point of unburdening his mind. Gabriel had returned to his lodgings near the Eastgate, and to his hopeless task of civilising his degraded centaurs. Lucy, after the manner of maids in love, was building air-castles with Sir Harry's assistance, and Mrs Pendle kept her usual watch on her weak heart and fluctuating pulse. The bishop thus escaped their particular notice, and it was mainly Cargrim who saw how distraught and anxious he was. As for Dr Graham, he had departed after a second unsatisfactory visit, swearing that he could do nothing with a man who refused to make a confidant of his doctor. Bishop Pendle was therefore wholly at the mercy of his suspicious chaplain, to be spied upon, to be questioned, to be watched, and to be made a prey of in his first weak moment. But the worried man,

filled with some unknown anxiety, was quite oblivious to Cargrim's manoeuvres.

For some time the chaplain, in spite of all his watchfulness, failed to come upon anything tangible likely to explain what was in the bishop's mind. He walked about restlessly, he brooded continuously, and instead of devoting himself to his work in his usual regular way, occupied himself for long hours in scribbling figures on his blotting-paper, and muttering at times in anxious tones. Cargrim examined the blotting-paper, and strained his ears to gather the sense of the mutterings, but in neither case could he gain any clue to the bishop's actual trouble. At length—it was on the morning of the second day after the reception—Dr Pendle abruptly announced that he was going up to London that very afternoon, and would go alone. The emphasis he laid on this last statement still further roused Cargrim's curiosity.

'Shall I not accompany your lordship?' he asked, as the bishop restlessly paced the library.

'No, Mr Cargrim, why should you?' said the bishop, abruptly and testily.

'Your lordship seems ill, and I thought—'

'There is no need for you to think, sir. I am not well, and my visit to London is in connection with my health.'

'Or with your secret!' thought the chaplain, deliberately bowing.

'I have every confidence in Dr Graham,' continued Pendle, 'but it is my intention to consult a specialist. I need not go into details, Mr Cargrim, as they will not interest you.'

'Oh, your lordship, your health is my constant thought.'

'Your anxiety is commendable, but needless,' responded the bishop, dryly. 'I am due at Southberry this Sunday, I believe.'

'There is a confirmation at St Mark's, your lordship.'

'Very good; you can make the necessary arrangements, Mr Cargrim. To-day is Thursday. I shall return to-morrow night, and shall rest on Saturday until the evening, when I shall ride over to Southberry, attend at St Mark's, and return on Sunday night.'

'Does not your lordship desire my attendance?' asked Cargrim, although he knew that he was the morning preacher in the cathedral on Sunday.

'No,' answered Dr Pendle, curtly, 'I shall go and return alone.'

The bishop looked at Cargrim, and Cargrim looked at the bishop, each striving to read the other's thoughts; then the latter turned away with a frown, and the former, much exercised in his mind, advanced towards the door of the library. Dr Pendle called him back.

'Not a word about my health to Mrs Pendle,' he said, sharply.

'Certainly not, your lordship; you can rely upon my discretion in every way,' replied the

chaplain, with emphasis, and glided away as soft-footed as any panther, and as dangerous.

'I wonder what the fellow suspects,' thought the bishop when alone. 'I can see that he is filled with curiosity, but he can never find out the truth, or even guess at it. I am safe enough from him. All the same, I'll have a fool for my next chaplain. Fools are easier to deal with.'

Cargrim would have given much to have overheard this speech, but as the door and several passages were between him and the talker, he was ignorant of the incriminating remarks the bishop had let slip. Still baffled, but still curious, he busied himself with attending to some business of the See which did not require the personal supervision of Dr Pendle, and when that prelate took his departure for London by the three o'clock train, Cargrim attended him to the station, full of meekness and irritating attentions. It was with a feeling of relief that the bishop saw his officious chaplain left behind on the platform. He had a secret, and with the uneasiness of a loaded conscience, fancied that everyone saw that he had something to conceal—particularly Cargrim. In the presence of that good young man, this spiritual lord, high-placed and powerful, felt that he resembled an insect under a microscope, and that Cargrim had his eye to the instrument. Conscience made a coward of the bishop, but in the case of his chaplain his uneasy feelings were in some degree justified.

On leaving the railway station, which was on the outskirts of the modern town, Cargrim took his way through the brisk population which thronged the streets, and wondered in what manner he could benefit by the absence of his superior. As he could not learn the truth from Dr Pendle himself, he thought that he might discover it from an investigation of the bishop's desk. For this purpose he returned to the palace forthwith, and on the plea of business, shut himself up in the library. Dr Pendle was a careless man, and never locked up any drawers, even those which contained his private papers. Cargrim, who was too much of a sneak to feel honourable scruples, went through these carefully, but in spite of all his predisposition to malignity, was unable to find any grounds for suspecting Dr Pendle to be in any serious trouble. At the end of an hour he found himself as ignorant as ever, and made only one discovery of any note, which was that the bishop had taken his cheque-book with him to London.

To many people this would have seemed a natural circumstance, as most men with banking accounts take their cheque-books with them when going on a journey. But Cargrim knew that the bishop usually preferred to fill his pockets with loose cash when absent for a short time, and this deviation from his ordinary habits appeared to be suspicious.

'Hum!' thought the chaplain, rubbing his

chin, 'I wonder if that so-called clergyman wanted money. If he had wished for a small sum, the bishop could easily have given it to him out of the cash-box. Going by this reasoning, he must have wanted a lot of money, which argues blackmail. Hum! Has he taken both cheque-books, or only one?'

The reason of this last query was that Bishop Pendle had accounts in two different banks. One in Beorminster, as became the bishop of the See; the other in London, in accordance with the dignity of a spiritual lord of Parliament. A further search showed Mr Cargrim that the Beorminster cheque-book had been left behind.

'Hum!' said the chaplain again, 'that man must have gone back to London. Dr Pendle is going to meet him there and draw money from his Town bank to pay what he demands. I'll have a look at the butts of that cheque-book when it comes back; the amount of the cheque may prove much. I may even find out the name of this stranger.'

But all this, as Cargrim very well knew, was pure theory. The bishop might have taken his cheque-book to London for other reasons than paying blackmail to the stranger, for it was not even certain that there was any such extortion in the question. Dr Pendle was worried, it was true, and after the departure of his strange visitor he had been taken ill, but these facts proved nothing; and after twisting and turning them in every way, and connecting and disconnecting them with the absence of the London cheque-book, Mr Cargrim was forced to acknowledge that he was beaten for the time being. Then he fancied he might extract some information from Gabriel relative to his father's departure for London, for Mr Cargrim was too astute to believe in the 'consulting a specialist' excuse. Still, this might serve as a peg whereon to hang his inquiries and develop further information, so the chaplain, after meditating over his five o'clock cup of tea, took his way to the Eastgate, in order to put Gabriel unawares into the witness-box. Yet, for all these doings and suspicions Cargrim had no very good reason, save his own desire to get Dr Pendle under his thumb. He was groping in the dark, he had not a shred of evidence to suppose that the uneasiness of the bishop was connected with anything criminal; nevertheless, the chaplain put himself so far out of his usual habits as to venture into the unsavoury neighbourhood wherein stood The Derby Winner. Truly this man's cob-web spinning was of a very dangerous character when he took so much trouble to weave the web.

As in Excelsior, the shades of night were falling fast, when Cargrim found himself at the door of the curate's lodging. Here he met with a check, for Gabriel's landlady informed him that Mr Pendle was not at

home, and she did not know where he was or when he would be back. Cargrim made the sweetest excuses for troubling the good lady, left message that he would call again, and returned along Monk Street on his way back to the palace through the new town. By going in this direction he passed The Derby Winner—not without intention—for it was this young man's belief that Gabriel might be haunting the public-house to see Mrs Mosk or—as was more probable to the malignant chaplain—her handsome daughter.

As he came abreast of The Derby Winner it was not too dark but that he could see a tall man standing in the doorway. Cargrim at first fancied that this might be Gabriel, and paced slowly along so as to seize an opportunity of addressing him. But when he came almost within touching distance, he found himself face to face with a dark-looking gipsy, fiery-eyed and dangerous in appearance. He had a lean, cruel face, a hawk's beak for a nose, and black, black hair streaked with grey; but what mostly attracted Cargrim's attention was a red streak which traversed the right cheek of the man from ear to mouth. At once he recalled John's description—'A military-looking gentleman with a scar on the right cheek.' He thought, 'Hum! this, then, is the bishop's visitor.'

CHAPTER VI

THE MAN WITH THE SCAR

THIS engaging individual looked at Cargrim with a fierce air. He was not sober, and had just reached the quarrelsome stage of intoxication, which means objection to everyone and everything. Consequently he cocked his hat defiantly at the curate; and although he blocked up the doorway, made no motion to stand aside. Cargrim was not ill pleased at this obstinacy, as it gave him an opportunity of entering into conversation with the so-called decayed clergyman, who was as unlike a parson as a rabbit is like a terrier.

'Do you know if Mr Pendle is within, my friend?' asked the chaplain, with bland politeness.

The stranger started at the mention of the name. His face grew paler, his scar waxed redder, and with all his Dutch courage there was a look of alarm visible in his cold eyes.

'I don't know,' said he, insolently, yet with a certain refinement of speech. 'I shouldn't think it likely that a pot-house like this would be patronised by a bishop.'

'Pardon me, sir, I speak of Mr Gabriel Pendle, the son of his lordship.'

'Then pardon me, sir,' mimicked the man, 'if I say that I know nothing of the son of his lordship; and what's more, I'm d——d if I want to.'

'I see! You are more fortunate in knowing his lordship himself,' said the chaplain, with great simplicity.

The stranger plucked at his worn sleeve with a look of irony. 'Do I look as though I were acquainted with bishops?' said he, scoffingly. 'Is this the kind of coat likely to be admitted into episcopal palaces?'

'Yet it was admitted, sir. If I am not mistaken you called at the palace two nights ago.'

'Did you see me?'

'Certainly I saw you,' replied Cargrim, salving his conscience with the Jesuitic saying that the end justifies the means. 'And I was informed that you were a decayed clergyman seeking assistance.'

'I have been most things in my time,' observed the stranger, gloomily, 'but not a parson. You are one, I perceive.'

Cargrim bowed. 'I am the chaplain of Bishop Pendle.'

'And the busybody of Beorminster, I should say,' rejoined the man, with a sneer. 'See here, my friend,' and he rapped Cargrim on the breast with a shapely hand, 'if you interfere in what does not concern you, there will be trouble. I saw Dr Pendle on private business, and as such it has nothing to do with you. Hold your tongue, you black crow, and keep away from me,' cried the stranger, with sudden ferocity, 'or I'll knock your head off. Now you know,' and with a fierce glance the man moved out of the doorway and sauntered round the corner before Cargrim could make up his mind how to resent this insolence.

'Hum!' said he to himself, with a glance at the tall retiring figure, 'that is a nice friend for a bishop to have. He's a jail-bird if I mistake not; and he is afraid of my finding out his business with Pendle. Birds of a feather,' sighed Mr Cargrim, entering the hotel. 'I fear, I sadly fear that his lordship is but a whitened sepulchre. A look into the bishop's past might show me many things of moment, and the fat living of Heathcroft seemed almost within Cargrim's grasp as he came to this conclusion.'

'Now then, sir,' interrupted a sharp but pleasant female voice, 'and what may you want?'

Mr Cargrim wheeled round to answer this question, and found himself face to face with a bar, glittering with brass and crystal and bright-hued liquors in fat glass barrels; also with an extremely handsome young woman, dressed in an astonishing variety of colours. She was high-coloured and frank-eyed, with a great quantity of very black hair twisted into many amazing shapes on the top of her head. In manner she was as brisk as a bee and as restless as a butterfly; and being adorned with a vast quantity of bracelets, and lockets, and brooches, all of gaudy patterns, jingled at every movement. This young lady was Miss Bell Mosk, whom the frequenters of The

Derby Winner called 'a dashing beauty,' and Mrs Pansey 'a painted jade.' With her glittering ornaments, her bright blue dress, her high colour, and general air of vivacity, she glowed and twinkled in the lamp-light like some gorgeous-plumaged parrot; and her free speech and constant chatter might have been ascribed to the same bird.

'Miss Mosk, I believe,' said the polite Cargrim, marvelling that this gaudy female should be the refined Gabriel's notion of feminine perfection.

'I am Miss Mosk,' replied Bell, taking a comprehensive view of the sleek, black-clad parson. 'What can I do for you?'

'I am Mr Cargrim, the Bishop's chaplain, Miss Mosk, and I wish to see Mr Pendle—Mr Gabriel Pendle.'

Bell flushed as red as the reddest cabbage rose, and with downcast eyes wiped the counter briskly with a duster. 'Why should you come here to ask for Mr Pendle?' said she, in guarded tones.

'I called at his lodgings, Miss Mosk, and I was informed that he was visiting a sick person here.'

'My mother!' replied Bell, not knowing what an amazing lie the chaplain was telling. 'Yes! Mr Pendle comes often to see—my mother.'

'Is he here now?' asked Cargrim, noticing the hesitancy at the end of her sentence; 'because I wish to speak with him on business.'

'He is upstairs. I daresay he'll be down soon.'

'Oh, don't disturb him for my sake, I beg. But if you will permit me I shall go up and see Mrs Mosk.'

'Here comes Mr Pendle now,' said Bell, abruptly, and withdrew into the interior of the bar as Gabriel appeared at the end of the passage. He started and seemed uneasy when he recognised the chaplain.

'Cargrim!' he cried, hurrying forward. 'Why are you here?' and he gave a nervous glance in the direction of the bar; a glance which the chaplain saw and understood, but discreetly left unnoticed.

'I wish to see you,' he replied, with great simplicity; 'they told me at your lodgings that you might be here, so—'

'Why!' interrupted Gabriel, sharply, 'I left no message to that effect.'

Cargrim saw that he had made a mistake. 'I speak generally, my dear friend—generally,' he said in some haste. 'Your worthy landlady mentioned several houses in which you were in the habit of seeing sick people—amongst others this hotel.'

'Mrs Mosk is very ill. I have been seeing her,' said Gabriel, shortly.

'Ay! ay! you have been seeing Mrs Mosk!'

Gabriel changed colour and cast another glance towards the bar, for the significance of Cargrim's speech was not lost on him. 'Do you wish to speak with me?' he asked coldly.

'I should esteem it a favour if you would allow me a few words,' said Cargrim, politely. 'I'll wait for you—outside,' and in his turn the chaplain looked towards the bar.

'Thank you, I can come with you now,' was Gabriel's reply, made with a burning desire to knock Cargrim down. 'Miss Mosk, I am glad to find that your mother is easier in her mind.'

'It's all due to you, Mr Pendle,' said Bell, moving forward with a toss of her head directed especially at Mr Cargrim. 'Your visits do mother a great deal of good.'

'I am sure they do,' said the chaplain, not able to forego giving the girl a scratch of his claws. 'Mr Pendle's visits here must be delightful to everybody.'

'I daresay,' retorted Bell, with heightened colour, 'other people's visits would not be so welcome.'

'Perhaps not, Miss Mosk. Mr Pendle has many amiable qualities to recommend him. He is a general and deserved favourite.'

'Come, come, Cargrim,' interposed Gabriel, anxiously, for the fair Bell's temper was rapidly getting the better of her; 'if you are ready we shall go. Good-evening, Miss Mosk.'

'Good-evening, Mr Pendle,' said the barmaid, and directed a spiteful look at Cargrim, for she saw plainly that he had intentionally deprived her of a confidential conversation with Gabriel. The chaplain received the look—which he quite understood—with an amused smile and a bland inclination of the head. As he walked out arm-in-arm with the reluctant Pendle, Bell banged the pewters and glasses about with considerable energy, for the significant demeanour of Cargrim annoyed her so much that she felt a great inclination to throw something at his head. But then, Miss Mosk was a high-spirited girl and believed in actions rather than speech, even though she possessed a fair command of the latter.

'Well, Cargrim,' said Gabriel, when he found himself in the street with his uncongenial companion, 'what is it?'

'It's about the bishop.'

'My father! Is there anything the matter with him?'

'I fear so. He told me that he was going to London.'

'What of that?' said Gabriel, impatiently. 'He told me the same thing yesterday. Has he gone?'

'He left by the afternoon train. Do you know the object of his visit to London?'

'No. What is his object?'

'He goes to consult a specialist about his health.'

'What!' cried Gabriel, anxiously. 'Is he ill?'

'I think so; some nervous trouble brought on by worry.'

'By worry! Has my father anything on his mind likely to worry him to that extent?'

Cargrim coughed significantly. 'I think

so,' said he again. 'He has not been himself since the visit of that stranger to the palace. I fancy the man must have brought bad news.'

'Did the bishop tell you so?'

'No; but I am observant, you know.'

Privately, Gabriel considered that Cargrim was a great deal too observant, and also of a meddlesome nature, else why had he come to spy out matters which did not concern him. Needless to say, Gabriel was thinking of Bell at this moment. However, he made no comment on the chaplain's speech, but merely remarked that doubtless the bishop had his own reasons for keeping silent, and advised Cargrim to wait until he was consulted in connection with the matter, before troubling himself unnecessarily about it. 'My father knows his own business best,' finished Gabriel, stiffly, 'if you will forgive my speaking so plainly.'

'Certainly, certainly; Pendle; but I owe a great deal to your father, and I would do much to save him from annoyance. By the way,' with an abrupt change of subject, 'do you know that I saw the stranger who called at the palace two nights ago during the reception?'

'When? Where?'

'At that hotel, this evening. He looks a dangerous man.'

Gabriel shrugged his shoulders. 'It seems to me, Cargrim, that you are making a mountain out of a mole hill. A stranger sees my father, and afterwards you meet him at a public-house; there is nothing strange in that.'

'You forget,' hinted Cargrim, sweetly, 'this man caused your father's illness.'

'We can't be sure of that; and in any case, my father is quite clever enough to deal with his own affairs. I see no reason why you should have hunted me out to talk such nonsense. Good-night, Cargrim,' and with a curt nod the curate stalked away, considerably annoyed by the meddlesome spirit manifested by the chaplain. He had never liked the man, and, now that he was in this interfering mood, liked him less than ever. It would be as well, thought Gabriel, that Mr Cargrim should be dismissed from his confidential office as soon as possible. Otherwise he might cause trouble, and Gabriel mentally thought of the high-coloured young lady in the bar. His conscience was not at ease regarding his admiration for her; and he dreaded lest the officious Cargrim should talk about her to the bishop. Altogether the chaplain, like a hornet, had annoyed both Dr Pendle and his son; and the bishop in London and Gabriel in Beominster were anything but well disposed towards this clerical busybody, who minded everyone's business instead of his own. It is such people who stir up muddy water and cause mischief.

Meanwhile, the busybody looked after the curate with an evil smile; and, gratified at

having aroused such irritation as the abrupt parting signified, turned back to The Derby Winner. He had seen Bell, he had spoken to Gabriel, he had even secured an unsatisfactory conversation with the unknown man. Now he wished to question Mrs Mosk and acquaint himself with her nature and attitude. Also he desired to question her concerning the military stranger; and with this resolve presented himself again before Miss Mosk, smiling and undaunted.

'What is it?' asked the young lady, who had been nursing her grievances.

'A mere trifle, Miss Mosk; I wish to see your mother.'

'Why?' was Bell's blunt demand.

'My reasons are for Mrs Mosk's ears alone.'

'Oh, are they? Well, I'm afraid you can't see my mother. In the first place, she's too ill to receive anyone; and in the second, my father does not like clergymen.'

'Dear! dear! not even Mr Pendle?'

'Mr Pendle is an exception,' retorted Bell, blushing, and again fell to wiping the counter in a fury, so as to keep her hands from Mr Cargrim's ears.

'I wish to see Mrs Mosk particularly,' reiterated Cargrim, who was bent upon carrying his point. 'If not, your father will do.'

'My father is absent in Southberry. Why do you want to see my mother?'

'I'll tell her that myself—with your permission,' said Cargrim, suavely.

'You sha'n't, then,' cried Bell, and flung down her duster with sparkling eyes.

'In that case I must go away,' replied Cargrim, seeing he was beaten, 'and I thank you, Miss Mosk, for your politeness. By the way,' he added, as he half returned, 'will you tell that gentleman with the scar on the cheek that I wish to see him also?'

'Seems to me you wish to see everybody about here,' said Bell, scornfully. 'I'll tell Mr Jentham if you like. Now go away; I'm busy.'

'Jentham!' repeated Cargrim, as he walked homeward. 'Now, I wonder if I'll find that name in the bishop's cheque-book.'

CHAPTER VII

AN INTERESTING CONVERSATION

WHEN Mr Cargrim took an idea into his head it was not easy to get it out again, and to this resolute obstinacy he owed no small part of his success. He was like the famous drop of water and would wear away any human stone, however hard it might be. Again and again, when baffled, he returned with gentle persistence to the object he had in view, and however strong of will his adversary happened to be, that will was bound, in the long run, to yield to the incessant attacks of the chaplain. At

the present moment he desired to have an interview with Mrs Mosk, and he was determined to obtain one in spite of Bell's refusal. However, he had no time to waste on the persuasive method, as he wished to see the invalid before the bishop returned. To achieve this end he enlisted the services of Mrs Pansey.

That good lady sometimes indulged in a species of persecution she termed district-visiting, which usually consisted in her thrusting herself at untoward times into poor people's houses and asking them questions about their private affairs. When she had learned all she wished to know, and had given her advice in the tone of a command not to be disobeyed, she would retire, leaving the evidence of her trail behind her in the shape of a nauseous little tract with an abusive title. It was no use any poor creature refusing to see Mrs Pansey, for she forced herself into the most private chambers, and never would retire unless she thought fit to do so of her own will. It was for this reason that Cargrim suggested the good lady should call upon Mrs Mosk, for he knew well that neither the father, nor the daughter, nor the whole assembled domestics of the hotel would be able to stop her from making her way to the bedside of the invalid; and in the devastated rear of Mrs Pansey the chaplain intended to follow.

His principal object in seeing Mrs Mosk was to discover what she knew about the man called Jentham. He was lodging at The Derby Winner, as Cargrim ascertained by later inquiry, and it was probable that the inmates of the hotel knew something as to the reasons of his stay in Beorminster. Mr Mosk, being as obstinate as a mule, was not likely to tell Cargrim anything he desired to learn. Bell, detesting the chaplain, as she took no pains to conceal, would probably refuse to hold a conversation with him; but Mrs Mosk, being weak-minded and ill, might be led by dexterous questioning to tell all she knew. And what she did know might, in Cargrim's opinion, throw more light on Jentham's connection with the bishop. Therefore, the next morning, Cargrim called on the archdeacon's widow to inveigle her into persecuting Mrs Mosk with a call. Mrs Pansey, with all her acuteness, could not see that she was being made use of—luckily for Cargrim.

'I hear the poor woman is very ill,' sighed the chaplain, after he had introduced the subject, 'and I fear that her daughter does not give her all the attention an invalid should have.'

'The Jezebel!' growled Mrs Pansey. 'What can you expect from that flaunting hussy?'

'She is a human being, Mrs Pansey, and I expect at least human feelings.'

'Can you get blood out of a stone, Mr Cargrim? No, you can't. Is that red-cheeked Dutch doll a pelican to pluck her

breast for the benefit of her mother? No, indeed! I daresay she passes her sinful hours drinking with young men. I'd whip her at a cart's tail if I had my way.'

'Gabriel Pendle is trying to bring the girl to a sense of her errors.'

'Rubbish! She's trying to bring him to the altar, more like. I'll go with you, Mr Cargrim, and see the minx. I have long thought that it is my duty to reprove her and warn her mother of such goings-on. As for that weak-minded young Pendle,' cried Mrs Pansey, shaking her head furiously, 'I pity his infatuation; but what can you expect from such a mother as his mother? Can a fool produce sense? No!'

'I am afraid you will find the young woman difficult to deal with.'

'That makes me all the more determined to see her, Mr Cargrim. I'll tell her the truth for once in her life. Marry young Pendle indeed!' snorted the good lady. 'I'll let her see.'

'Speak to her mother first,' urged Cargrim, who wished his visit to be less warlike, as more conducive to success.

'I'll speak to both of them. I daresay one is as bad as the other. I must have that public-house removed; it's an eye-sore to Beorminster—a curse to the place. It ought to be pulled down and the site ploughed up and sown with salt. Come with me, Mr Cargrim, and you shall see how I deal with iniquity. I hope I know what is due to myself.'

'Where is Miss Norsham?' asked the chaplain, when they fell into more general conversation on their way to The Derby Winner.

'Husband-hunting. Dean Alder is showing her the tombs in the cathedral. Tombs, indeed! It's the altar she's interested in.'

'My dear lady, the dean is too old to marry!'

'He is not too old to be made a fool of, Mr Cargrim. As for Daisy Norsham, she'd marry Methuselah to take away the shame of being single. Not that the match with Alder will be out of the way, for she's no chicken herself.'

'I rather thought Mr Dean had an eye to Miss Whichello.'

'Stuff!' rejoined Mrs Pansey, with a sniff. 'She's far too much taken up with dieting people to think of marrying them. She actually weighs out the food on the table when meals are on. No wonder that poor girl Mab is thin.'

'But she isn't too thin for her height, Mrs Pansey. She seems to me to be well covered.'

'You didn't notice her at the palace, then,' snapped the widow, avoiding a direct reply. 'She wore a low-necked dress which made me blush. I don't know what girls are coming to. They'd go about like so many Eves if they could.'

'Oh, Mrs Pansey!' remonstrated the chaplain, in a shocked tone.

'Well, it's in the Bible, isn't it, man? You aren't going to say Holy Writ is indecent, are you?'

'Well, really, Mrs Pansey, clergyman as I am, I must say that there are parts of the Bible unfit for the use of schools.'

'To the pure all things are pure, Mr Cargrim; you have an impure mind, I fear. Remember the Thirty-Nine Articles and speak becomingly of holy things. However, let that pass,' added Mrs Pansey, in livelier tones. 'Here we are, and there's that hussy hanging out from an upper window like the Jezebel she is.'

This remark was directed against Bell, who, apparently in her mother's room, was at the window amusing herself by watching the passers-by. When she saw Mrs Pansey and the chaplain stalking along in black garments, and looking like two birds of prey, she hastily withdrew, and by the time they arrived at the hotel was at the doorway to receive them, with fixed bayonets.

'Young woman,' said Mrs Pansey, severely, 'I have come to see your mother,' and she cast a disapproving look on Bell's gay pink dress.

'She is not well enough to see either you or Mr Cargrim,' said Bell, coolly.

'All the more reason that Mr Cargrim, as a clergyman, should look after her soul, my good girl.'

'Thank you, Mr Pendle is doing that.'

'Indeed! Mr Pendle, then, combines business with pleasure.'

Bell quite understood the insinuation conveyed in this last speech, and, firing up, would have come to high words with the visitors but that her father made his appearance, and, as she did not wish to draw forth remarks from Mrs Pansey about Gabriel in his hearing, she discreetly held her tongue. However, as Mrs Pansey swept by in triumph, followed by Cargrim, she looked daggers at them both, and bounced into the bar, where she drew beer for thirsty customers in a flaming temper. She dearly desired a duel of words with the formidable visitor.

Mosk was a lean, tall man with a pimpled face and a military moustache. He knew Mrs Pansey, and, like most other people, detested her with all his heart; but she was, as he thought, a great friend of Sir Harry Brace, who was his landlord, so for diplomatic reasons he greeted her with all deference, hat in hand.

'I have come with Mr Cargrim to see your wife, Mr Mosk,' said the visitor.

'Thank you, ma'am, I'm sure it's very kind of you,' replied Mosk, who had a husky voice suggestive of beer. 'She'll be honoured to see you, I'm sure. This way, ma'am.'

'Is she very ill?' demanded the chaplain, as they followed Mosk to the back of the hotel and up a narrow staircase.

'She ain't well, sir, but I can't say as she's dying. We do all we can to make her easy.'

'Ho!' from Mrs Pansey. 'I hope your daughter acts towards her mother like as a daughter should.'

'I'd like to see the person as says she don't,' cried Mr Mosk, with sudden anger. 'I'd knock his head off. Bell's a good girl; none better.'

'Let us hope your trust in her is justified,' sighed the mischief-maker, and passed into the sickroom, leaving Mosk with an uneasy feeling that something was wrong. If the man had a tender spot in his heart it was for his handsome daughter; and it was with a vague fear that, after presenting his wife to her visitors, he went downstairs to the bar. Mrs Pansey had a genius for making mischief by a timely word.

'Bell,' said he, gruffly, 'what's that old cat hinting at?'

'What about?' asked Bell, tossing her head till all her ornaments jingled, and wiping the counter furiously.

'About you! She don't think I should trust you.'

'What right has she to talk about me, I'd like to know!' cried Bell, getting as red as a peony. 'I've never done anything that anyone can say a word against me.'

'Who said you had?' snapped her father; 'but that old cat hints.'

'Let her keep her hints to herself, then. Because I'm young and good-looking she wants to take my character away. Nasty old puss that she is!'

'That's just it, my gal. You're too young and good-looking to escape folks' talking; and I hear that young Mr Pendle comes round when I'm away.'

'Who says he doesn't, father? It's to see mother; he's a parson, ain't he?'

'Yes! and he's gentry too. I won't have him paying attention to you.'

'You'd better wait till he does,' flashed out Bell. 'I can take care of myself, I hope.'

'If I catch him talking other than religion to you I'll choke him in his own collar,' cried Mr Mosk, with a scowl; 'so now you know.'

'I know as you're talking nonsense, father. Time enough for you to interfere when there's cause. Now you clear out and let me get on with my work.'

Reassured by the girl's manner, Mosk began to think that Mrs Pansey's hints were all moonshine, and after cooling himself with a glass of beer, went away to look into his betting-book with some horsey pals. In the meantime, Mrs Pansey was persecuting his wife, a meek, nervous little woman, who was propped up with pillows in a large bed, and seemed to be quite overwhelmed by the honour of Mrs Pansey's call.

'So you are weak in the back, are you?' said the visitor, in loud tones. 'If you are,

what right have you to marry and bring feeble children into the world?’

‘Bell isn’t feeble,’ said Mrs Mosk, weakly. ‘She’s a fine set-up gal.’

‘Set-up and stuck-up,’ retorted Mrs Pansey. ‘I tell you what, my good woman, you ought to be downstairs looking after her.’

‘Lord! mum, there ain’t nothing wrong, I do devoutly hope.’

‘Nothing as yet; but you shouldn’t have young gentlemen about the place.’

‘I can’t help it, mum,’ said Mrs Mosk, beginning to cry. ‘I’m sure we must earn our living somehow. This is an *otel*, isn’t it? and Mosk’s a pop’lar character, ain’t he? I’m sure it’s hard enough to make ends meet as it is; we owe rent for half a year and can’t pay — and won’t pay,’ wailed Mrs Mosk, ‘unless my husband comes ‘ome on Skinflint.’

‘Comes home on Skinflint, woman, what do you mean?’

‘Skinflint’s a *’orse*, mum, as Mosk ‘ave put his shirt on.’

Mrs Pansey wagged her plumes and groaned. ‘I’m sadly afraid your husband is a son of perdition, Mrs Mosk. Put his shirt on Skinflint, indeed!’

‘He’s a good man to me, anyhow,’ cried Mrs Mosk, plucking up spirit.

‘Drink and betting,’ continued Mrs Pansey, pretending not to hear this feeble defiance. ‘What can we expect from a man who drinks and bets?’

‘And associates with bad characters,’ put in Cargrim, seizing his chance.

‘That he don’t, sir,’ said Mrs Mosk, with energy. ‘May I beg of you to put a name to one of ‘em?’

‘Jenthiam,’ said the chaplain, softly. ‘Who is Jenthiam, Mrs Mosk?’

‘I know no more nor a babe unborn, sir. He’s bin ‘ere two weeks, and I did see him twice afore my back got so bad as to force me to bed. But I don’t see why you calls him bad, sir. He pays his way.’

‘Oh,’ groaned Mrs Pansey, ‘is it the chief end of man to pay his way?’

‘It is with us, mum,’ retorted Mrs Mosk, meekly; ‘there ain’t no denying of it. And Mr Jenthiam do pay proper though he *is* a gipsy.’

‘He’s a gipsy, is he?’ said Cargrim, alertly.

‘So he says, sir; and I knows as he goes sometimes to that camp of gipsies on Southberry Heath.’

‘Where does he get his money from?’

‘Better not inquire into that, Mr Cargrim,’ said Mrs Pansey, with a sniff.

‘Oh, Mr Jenthiam’s honest, I’m sure, mum. He’s bin at the gold diggin’s and ‘ave made a trifle of money. Indeed, I don’t know where he ain’t been, sir. The four pints of the compass is all plain sailing to ‘im; and his *airbreadth escapes* is too h’awful. I shivers and shudders when I ‘ears ‘em.’

‘What is he doing here?’

‘He’s on business; but I don’t know what kind. Oh, he knows ‘ow to ‘old ‘is tongue, does Jenthiam.’

‘He is a gipsy, he consorts with gipsies, he has money, and no one knows where he comes from,’ summed up Cargrim. ‘I think, Mrs Pansey, we may regard this man as a dangerous character.’

‘I shouldn’t be surprised to hear he was an Anarchist,’ said Mrs Pansey, who knew nothing about the man. ‘Well, Mrs Mosk, I hope we’ve cheered you up. I’ll go now. Read this tract,’ bestowing a grimy little pamphlet, ‘and don’t see too much of Mr Pendle.’

‘But he comforts me,’ said poor Mrs Mosk; ‘he reads beautiful.’

Mrs Pansey grunted. Bold as she was she did not like to speak quite plainly to the woman, as too free speech might inculpate Gabriel and bring the bishop to the rescue. Besides, Mrs Pansey had no evidence to bring forward to prove that Gabriel was in love with Bell Mosk. Therefore she said nothing, but, like the mariner’s parrot, thought the more. Shaking out her dark skirts she rose to go, with another grunt full of unspoken suspicions.

‘Good-day, Mrs Mosk,’ said she, pausing at the door. ‘When you are low-spirited send for me to cheer you up.’

Mrs Mosk attempted a curtsey in bed, which was a failure owing to her sitting position; but Mrs Pansey did not see the attempt, as she was already half-way down the stairs, followed by Cargrim. The chaplain had learned a trifle more about the mysterious Jenthiam and was quite satisfied with his visit; but he was more puzzled than ever. A tramp, a gipsy, an adventurer — what had such a creature in common with Bishop Pendle? To Mr Cargrim’s eye the affair of the visit began to assume the proportions of a criminal case. But all the information he had gathered proved nothing, so it only remained to wait for the bishop’s return and see what discoveries he could make in that direction. If Jenthiam’s name was in the cheque-book the chaplain would be satisfied that there was an understanding between the pair; and then his next move would be to learn what the understanding was. When he discovered that, he had no doubt but that he would have Dr Pendle under his thumb, which would be a good thing for Mr Cargrim and an unpleasant position for the bishop.

Mrs Pansey stalked down to the bar, and seeing Bell therein, silently placed a little tract on the counter. No sooner had she left the house than Bell snatched up the tract, and rushing to the door flung it after the good lady.

‘You need it more than I do,’ she cried, and bounced into the house again.

It was with a quiver of rage that Mrs Pansey turned to the chaplain. She was almost past speech, but with some difficulty and much

choking managed to convey her feelings in two words.

'The creature!' gasped Mrs Pansey, and shook her skirts as if to rid herself of some taint contracted at The Derby Winner.

CHAPTER VIII

ON SATURDAY NIGHT

THE bishop returned on Saturday morning instead of on Friday night as arranged, and was much more cheerful than when he left, a state of mind which irritated Cargrim in no small degree, and also perplexed him not a little. If Dr Pendle's connection with Jentham was dangerous he should still be ill at ease and anxious, instead of which he was almost his old genial self when he joined his wife and Lucy at their afternoon tea. Sir Harry was not present, but Mr Cargrim supplied his place, an exchange which was not at all to Lucy's mind. The Pendles treated the chaplain always with a certain reserve, and the only person who really thought him the good young man he appeared to be, was the bishop's wife. But kindly Mrs Pendle was the most innocent of mortals, and all geese were swans to her. She had not the necessary faculty of seeing through a brick wall with which nature had gilded Mrs Pansey in so extraordinary a degree.

As a rule, Mr Cargrim did not come to afternoon tea, but on this occasion he presented himself; ostensibly to welcome back his patron, in reality to watch him. Also he was determined, at the very first opportunity, to introduce the name of Jentham and observe what effect it had on the bishop. With these little plans in his mind the chaplain crept about the tea-table like a tame cat, and handed round cake and bread with his most winning smile. His pale face was even more inexpressive than usual, and none could have guessed, from outward appearance, his malicious intents—least of all the trio he was with. They were too upright themselves to suspect evil in others.

'I am so glad to see you are better, bishop,' said Mrs Pendle, languidly trifling with a cup of tea. 'Your journey has done you good.'

'Change of air, change of air, my dear. A wonderful restorative.'

'Your business was all right, I hope?'

'Oh, yes! Indeed, I hardly went up on business, and what I did do was a mere trifle,' replied the bishop, smoothing his apron. 'Has Gabriel been here to-day?' he added, obviously desirous of turning the conversation.

'Twice!' said Lucy, who presided over the tea-table; 'and the second time he told mamma that he had received a letter from George.'

'Ay, ay! a letter from George. Is he quite well, Lucy?'

'We shall see that for ourselves this evening, papa. George is coming to Beaminster, and will be here about ten o'clock to-night.'

'How vexing!' exclaimed Dr Pendle. 'I intended going over to Southberry this evening, but I can't miss seeing George.'

'Ride over to-morrow morning, bishop,' suggested his wife.

'Sunday morning, my dear!'

'Well, papa!' said Lucy, smiling, 'you are not a strict Sabbatarian, you know.'

'I am not so good as I ought to be, my dear,' said Dr Pendle, playfully pinching her pretty ear. 'Well! well! I must see George. I'll go to-morrow morning at eight o'clock. You'll send a telegram to Mr Vasser to that effect, if you please, Mr Cargrim. Say that I regret not being able to come to-night.'

'Certainly, my lord. In any case, I am going in to Beaminster this evening.'

'You are usually more stay-at-home, Mr Cargrim. Thank you, Lucy, I will take another cup of tea.'

'I do not care for going out at night as a rule, my lord,' observed the chaplain, in his most sanctimonious tone, 'but duty calls me into Beaminster. I am desirous of comforting poor sick Mrs Mosk at The Derby Winner.'

'Oh, that is Gabriel's pet invalid,' cried Lucy, peering into the teapot; 'he says Mrs Mosk is a very good woman.'

'Let us hope so,' observed the bishop, stirring his new cup of tea. 'I do not wish to be uncharitable, my dear, but if Mrs Pansey is to be believed, that public-house is not conducted so carefully as it should be.'

'But is Mrs Pansey to be believed, bishop?' asked his wife, smiling.

'I don't think she would tell a deliberate falsehood, my love.'

'All the same, she might exaggerate little into much,' said Lucy, with a pretty grimace. 'What is your opinion of this hotel, Mr Cargrim?'

The chaplain saw his opportunity and seized it at once. 'My dear Miss Pendle,' he said, showing all his teeth, 'as The Derby Winner is the property of Sir Harry Brace I wish I could speak well of it, but candour compels me to confess that it is a badly-conducted house.'

'Tut! tut!' said the bishop, 'what is this? You don't say so.'

'Harry shall shut it up at once,' cried Lucy, the pretty Puritan.

'It is a resort of bad characters, I fear,' sighed Cargrim, 'and Mrs Mosk, being an invalid, is not able to keep them away.'

'What about the landlord, Mr Cargrim?'

'Aha!' replied the chaplain, turning towards Mrs Pendle, who had asked this question, 'he is a man of lax morals. His boon companion is a tramp called Jentham!'

'Jentham!' repeated Dr Pendle, in so complacent a tone that Cargrim, with some vexation, saw that he did not associate the name with his visitor; 'and who is Jentham?'

'I hardly know,' said the chaplain, making another attempt; 'he is a tramp, as I have reason to believe, and consorts with gipsies. I saw him myself the other day—a tall, lean man with a scar.'

The bishop rose, and walking over to the tea-table placed his cup carefully thereon. 'With a scar,' he repeated in low tones. 'A man with a scar—Jentham—indeed! What do you know of this person, Mr Cargrim?'

'Absolutely nothing,' rejoined the chaplain, with a satisfied glance at the uneasy face of his questioner. 'He is a gipsy; he stays at The Derby Winner and pays regularly for his lodgings; and his name is Jentham. I know no more.'

'I don't suppose there is more to know,' cried Lucy, lightly.

'If there is, the police may find out, Miss Pendle.'

The bishop frowned. 'As the man, so far as we know, has done nothing against the laws,' said he, quickly, 'I see no reason why the police should be mentioned in connection with him. Evidently, from what Mr Cargrim says, he is a rolling stone, and probably will not remain much longer in Beorminster. Let us hope that he will take himself and his bad influence away from our city. In the meantime, it is hardly worth our while to discuss a person of so little importance.'

In this skilful way the bishop put an end to the conversation, and Cargrim, fearful of rousing his suspicions, did not dare to resume it. In a little while, after a few kind words to his wife, Dr Pendle left the drawing-room for his study. As he passed out, Cargrim noticed that the haggard look had come back to his face, and once or twice he glanced anxiously at his wife. In his turn Cargrim examined Mrs Pendle, but saw nothing in her manner likely to indicate that she shared the uneasiness of her husband, or knew the cause of his secret anxiety. She looked calm and content, and there was a gentle smile in her weary eyes. Evidently the bishop's mind was set at rest by her placid looks, for it was with a sigh of relief that he left the room. Cargrim noted the look and heard the sigh, but was wholly in the dark regarding their meaning.

'Though I daresay they have to do with Jentham and this secret,' he thought, when bowing himself out of the drawing-room. 'Whatever the matter may be, Dr Pendle is evidently most anxious to keep his wife from knowing of it. All the better.' He rubbed his hands together with a satisfied smirk. 'Such anxiety shows that the secret is worth learning. Sooner or later I shall find it out, and then I can insist upon being the rector of Heathcroft. I have no time to lose, so I shall go to The Derby Winner to night and see if I can induce this mysterious Jentham to speak out. He looks a drunken dog, so a glass of wine may unloosen his tongue.'

From this speech it can be seen that Mr

Cargrim was true to his Jesuitic instincts, and thought no action dishonourable so long as it aided him to gain his ends. He was a methodical scoundrel, too, and arranged the details of his scheme with the utmost circumspection. For instance, prior to seeing the man with the scar, he thought it advisable to find out if the bishop had drawn a large sum of money while in London for the purpose of bribing the creature to silence. Therefore, before leaving the palace, he made several attempts to examine the cheque-book. But Dr Pendle remained constantly at his desk in the library, and although the plotter actually saw the cheque book at the elbow of his proposed victim, he was unable, without any good reason, to pick it up and satisfy his curiosity. He was therefore obliged to defer any attempt to obtain it until the next day, as the bishop would probably leave it behind him when he rode over to Southberry. This failure vexed the chaplain, as he wished to be forearmed in his interview with Jentham, but, as there was no help for it, he was obliged to put the cart before the horse—in other words, to learn what he could from the man first and settle the bribery question by a peep into the cheque-book afterwards. The ingenious Mr Cargrim was by no means pleased with this slip-slop method of conducting business. There was method in his villainy.

That evening, after despatching the telegram to Southberry, the chaplain repaired to The Derby Winner and found it largely patronised by a noisy and thirsty crowd. The weather was tropical, the workmen of Beorminster had received their wages, so they were converting the coin of the realm into beer and whisky as speedily as possible. The night was calm and comparatively cool with the spreading darkness, and the majority of the inhabitants were seated outside their doors gossiping and taking the air. Children were playing in the street, their shrill voices at times interrupting the continuous chatter of the women; and The Derby Winner, flaring with gas, was stuffed as full as it could hold with artisans, workmen, Irish harvesters, and stablemen, all more or less exhilarated with alcohol. It was by no means a scene into which the fastidious Cargrim would have ventured of his own free will, but his desire to pump Jentham was greater than his sense of disgust, and he walked briskly into the hotel, to where Mr Mosk and Bell were dispensing drinks as fast as they were able. The crowd, having an inherent respect for the clergy, as became the inhabitants of a cathedral city, opened out to let him pass, and there was much less swearing and drinking when his black coat and clerical collar came into view. Mosk saw that the appearance of the chaplain was detrimental to business, and resenting his presence gave him but a surly greeting. As to Bell, she tossed her head, shot a withering glance of

defiance at the bland newcomer, and withdrew to the far end of the bar.

'My friend,' said Cargrim, in his softest tones, 'I have come to see your wife and inquire how she is.'

'She's well enough,' growled Mosk, pushing a foaming tankard towards an expectant navvy, 'and what's more, sir, she's asleep, sir, so you can't see her.'

'I should be sorry to disturb her, Mr Mosk, so I will postpone my visit till a more fitted occasion. You seem to be busy to-night.'

'So busy that I've got no time for talking, sir.'

'Far be it from me to distract your attention, my worthy friend,' was the chaplain's bland reply, 'but with your permission I will remain in this corner and enjoy the humours of the scene.'

Mosk inwardly cursed the visitor for making this modest request, as he detested parsons on account of their aptitude to make teetotalers of his customers. He was a brute in his way, and a Radical to boot, so if he had dared he would have driven forth Cargrim with a few choice oaths. But as his visitor was the chaplain of the ecclesiastical sovereign of Beominster, and was acquainted with Sir Harry Brace, the owner of the hotel, and further, as Mosk could not pay his rent and was already in bad odour with his landlord, he judged it wise to be diplomatic, lest a word from Cargrim to the bishop and Sir Harry should make matters worse. He therefore grudgingly gave the required permission.

'Though this ain't a sight fit for the likes of you, sir,' he grumbled, waving his hand. 'This lot smells and they swears, and they gets rowdy in their cups, so I won't answer as they won't offend you.'

'My duty has carried me into much more unsavoury localities, my friend. The worse the place the more is my presence, as a clergyman, necessary.'

'You ain't going to preach, sir?' cried Mosk, in alarm.

'No! that would indeed be casting pearls before swine,' replied Cargrim, in his cool tones. 'But I will observe and reflect.'

The landlord looked uneasy. 'I know as the place is rough,' he said apologetically, 'but 'tain't my fault. You won't go talking to Sir Harry, I hope, sir, and take the bread out of my mouth?'

'Make your mind easy, Mosk. It is not my place to carry tales to your landlord; and I am aware that the lower orders cannot conduct themselves with decorum, especially on Saturday night. I repine that such a scene should be possible in a Christian land, but I don't blame you for its existence.'

'That's all right, sir,' said Mosk, with a sigh of relief. 'I'm rough but honest, whatever lies may be told to the contrary. If I can't pay my rent, that ain't my fault, I hope, as it ain't to be expected as I can do miracles,'

'The age of miracles is past, my worthy friend,' replied Cargrim, in conciliatory tones. 'We must not expect the impossible nowadays. By the way—with a sudden change—'have you a man called Jentharn here?'

'Yes, I have,' growled Mosk, looking suspiciously at his questioner. 'What do you know of him, sir?'

'Nothing; but I take an interest in him as he seems to be one who has known better days.'

'He don't know them now, at all events, Mr Cargrim. He owes me money for this last week, he does. He paid all right at first, but he don't pay now.'

'Indeed,' said the chaplain, pricking up his ears, 'he owes you money?'

'That he does; more nor two quid, sir. But he says he'll pay me soon.'

'Ah! he says he'll pay you soon,' repeated Cargrim; 'he expects to receive money, then?'

'I s'pose so, tho' Lord knows!—I beg pardon, sir—tho' goodness knows where it's coming from. He don't work or get wages as I can see.'

'I think I know,' thought Cargrim; then added aloud, 'Is the man here?'

'In the coffee-room yonder, sir. Half drunk he is, and lying like a good one. The yarns he reels off is wonderful.'

'No doubt; a man like that must be interesting to listen to. With your permission, Mr Mosk, I'll go into the coffee-room.'

'Straight ahead, sir. Will you take something to drink, if I may make so bold, Mr Cargrim?'

'No, my friend, no; thank you all the same,' and with a nod Cargrim pushed his way into the coffee-room to see the man with the scar.

CHAPTER IX

AN EXCITING ADVENTURE

MR CARGRIM found a considerable number of people in the coffee-room, and these, with tankards and glasses before them, were listening to the conversation of Jentharn. Tobacco smoke filled the apartment with a thick atmosphere of fog, through which the gas-lights flared in a nebulous fashion, and rendered the air so hot that it was difficult to breathe in spite of the windows being open. At the head of the long table sat Jentharn, drinking brandy-and-soda, and speaking in his cracked, refined voice with considerable spirit, his rat-like, quick eyes glittering the while with alcoholic lustre. He seemed to be considerably under the influence of drink, and his voice ran up and down from bass to treble as he became excited in narrating his adventures.

Whether these were true or false Cargrim

could not determine ; for although the man trenched again and again on the marvellous, he certainly seemed to be fully acquainted with what he was talking about, and related the most wonderful stories in a thoroughly dramatic fashion. Like Ulysses, he knew men and cities, and appeared to have travelled as much as that famous globe-trotter. In his narration he passed from China to Chili, sailed north to the Pole, steamed south to the Horn, described the paradise of the South Seas, and discoursed about the wild wastes of snowy Siberia. The capitals of Europe appeared to be as familiar to him as the chair he was seated in ; and the steppes of Russia, the deserts of Africa, the sheep runs of Australia were all mentioned in turn, as adventure after adventure fell from his lips. And mixed up with these geographical accounts were thrilling tales of treasure-hunting, of escapes from savages, of perilous deeds in the secret places of great cities ; and details of blood, and war, and lust, and hate, all told in a fiercely dramatic fashion. The man was a tramp, a gipsy, a ragged, penniless rolling-stone ; but in his own way he was a genius. Cargrim wondered, with all his bravery, and endurance, and resource, that he had not made his fortune. The eloquent scamp seemed to wonder also.

'For,' said he, striking the table with his fist, 'I have never been able to hold what I. won. I've been a millionaire twice over, but the gold wouldn't stay ; it drifted away, it was swept away, it vanished, like Macbeth's witches, into thin air. Look at me, you country cabbages ! I've reigned a king amongst savages. A poor sort of king, say you ; but a king's a king, say I ; and king I have been. Yet here I am, sitting in a Beaminster gutter, but I don't stay in it. By—' he confirmed his purpose with an oath, 'not I. I've got my plans laid, and they'll lift me up to the stars yet.'

'Hev you the money, mister ?' inquired a sceptical listener.

'What's that to you ?' cried Jentham, and finished his drink. 'Yes, I have money !' He set down his empty glass with a bang. 'At least I know where to get it. Bah ! you fools, one can get blood out of a stone if one knows how to go about it. I know ! I know ! My Tom Tiddler's ground isn't far from your holy township,' and he began to sing, —

'Southberry Heath's Tom Tiddler's ground,
Gold and silver are there to be found.
It's dropped by the priest, picked up by the knave,
For the one is a coward, the other is brave.'

More brandy, waiter ; make it stiff, sonny ! stiff ! stiff ! stiff !'

The man's wild speech and rude song were unintelligible to his stupid, drink-bemused audience ; but the keen brain of the schemer lurking near the door picked up their sense at once. Dr Pendle was the priest who was to drop the money on Southberry Heath, and

Jentham the knave who was to pick it up. As certainly as though the man had given chapter and verse, Cargrim understood his enigmatic stave. His mind flashed back to the memory that Dr Pendle intended to ride over to Southberry in the morning, across the heath. Without doubt he had agreed to meet there this man who boasted that he could get blood out of a stone, and the object of the meeting was to bribe him to silence. But however loosely Jentham alluded to his intention of picking up gold, he was cunning enough, with all his excitement, to hold his tongue as to how he could work such a miracle. Undoubtedly there was a secret between Dr Pendle and this scamp ; but what it might be, Cargrim could by no means guess. Was Jentham a disreputable relation of the bishop's ? Had Dr Pendle committed a crime in his youth for which he was now being blackmailed ? What could be the nature of the secret which gave this unscrupulous blackguard a hold on a dignitary of the Church ? Cargrim's brain was quite bewildered by his conjectures.

Hitherto Jentham had been in the babbling stage of intoxication, but after another glass of drink he relapsed into a sullen, silent condition, and with his eyes on the table pulled fiercely at his pipe, so that his wicked face looked out like that of a devil from amid the rolling clouds of smoke. His audience waited open-mouthed for more stories, but as their entertainer seemed too moody to tell them any more, they began to talk amongst themselves, principally about horses and dogs. It was now growing late, and the most respectable of the crowd were moving homeward. Cargrim felt that to keep up the dignity of his cloth he should depart also ; for several looks of surprise were cast in his direction. But Jentham and his wild speeches fascinated him, and he lurked in his corner, watching the sullen face of the man until the two were left the sole occupants of the room. Then Jentham looked up to call the waiter to bring him a final drink, and his eyes met those of Mr Cargrim. After a keen glance he suddenly broke into a peal of discordant laughter, which died away into a savage and menacing growl.

'Hallo !' he grumbled, 'here is the busy-body of Beominster. And what may you want, Mr Paul Pry ?'

'A little civility in the first place, my worthy friend,' said Cargrim, in silky tones, for he did not relish the insolent tones of the satirical scamp.

'I am no friend to spies !'

'How dare you speak to me like that, fellow ?'

'You call me a fellow and I'll knock your head off,' cried Jentham, rising with a savage look in his eyes. 'If you aren't a spy why do you come sneaking round here ?'

'I came to see Mrs Mosk,' explained the chaplain, in a mighty dignified manner, 'but

she is asleep, so I could not see her. In passing the door of this room I heard you relating your adventures, and I naturally stopped to listen.'

'To hear if I had anything to say about my visit to your bishop, I suppose?' growled Jentham, unpleasantly. 'I have a great mind to tell him how you watch me, you infernal devil-dodger!'

'Respect my cloth, sir.'

'Begin by respecting it yourself, d—— you. What would his lordship of Beormminster say if he knew you were here?'

'His lordship does know.'

Jentham started. 'Perhaps he sent you?' he said, looking doubtful.

'No, he did not,' contradicted Cargrim, who saw that nothing was to be learned while the man was thus bemused with drink. 'I have told you the reason of my presence here. And as I am here, I warn you, as a clergyman, not to drink any more. You have already had more than enough.'

Jentham was staggered by the boldness of the chaplain, and stared at him open-mouthed; then recovering his speech, he poured forth such a volley of vile words at Cargrim that the chaplain stepped to the door and called the landlord. He felt that it was time for him to assert himself.

'This man is drunk, Mosk,' said he, sharply, 'and if you keep such a creature on your premises you will get into trouble.'

'Creature yourself!' cried Jentham, advancing towards Cargrim. 'I'll wring your neck if you use such language to me. I've killed fifty better men than you in my time, Mosk!' he turned with a snarl on the landlord, 'get me a drink of brandy.'

'I think you've had enough, Mr Jentham,' said the landlord, with a glance at Cargrim, 'and you know you owe me money.'

'Curse you, what of that?' raved Jentham, stamping. 'Do you think I'll not pay you?'

'I've not seen the colour of your money lately.'

'You'll see it when I choose. I'll have hundreds of pounds next week—hundreds,' and he broke out fiercely, 'get me more brandy; don't mind that devil-dodger.'

'Go to bed,' said Mosk, retiring, 'go to bed.'

Jentham ran after him with an angry cry, so Cargrim, feeling himself somewhat out of place in this pot-house row, nodded to Mosk and left the hotel with as much dignity as he could muster. As he went, the burden of Jentham's last speech—'hundreds of pounds! hundreds of pounds!'—rang in his ears; and more than ever he desired to examine the bishop's cheque-book, in order to ascertain the exact sum. The secret, he thought, must indeed be a precious one when the cost of its preservation ran into three figures.

When Cargrim emerged into the street it was still filled with people, as ten o'clock was

just chiming from the cathedral tower. The gossips had retired within, and lights were gleaming in the upper windows of the houses; but knots of neighbours still stood about here and there, talking and laughing loudly. Cargrim strolled slowly down the street towards the Eastgate, musing over his late experience, and enjoying the coolness of the night air after the sultry atmosphere of the coffee-room. The sky was now brilliant with stars, and a silver moon rolled aloft in the blue arch, shedding down floods of light on the town, and investing its commonplace aspect with something of romance. The streets were radiant with the cold, clear lustre; the shadows cast by the houses lay black as Indian ink on the ground; and the laughter and noise of the passers-by seemed woefully out of place in this magical white world.

Cargrim was alive to the beauty of the night, but was too much taken up with his thoughts to pay much attention to its mingled mystery of shadow and light. As he took his musing way through the wide streets of the modern town, he was suddenly brought to a standstill by hearing the voice of Jentham some distance away. Evidently the man had quarrelled with the landlord, and had been turned out of the hotel, for he came rolling along in a lurching, drunken manner, roaring out a wild and savage ditty, picked up, no doubt, in some land at the back of beyond.

'Oh, I have trekked the eight world climes,
And sailed the seven seas:
I've made my pile a hundred times,
And cracked the lot on sprees.

But when my ship comes home, my lads,
Why, curse me, don't I know
The spot that's worth, the blooming earth,
The spot where I shall go.

They call it Callao! for oh, it's Callao.
For on no condition
Is extradition
Allowed in Callao.'

Jentham roared and ranted the fierce old chanty with as much gusto and noise as though he were camping in the waste lands to which the song applied, instead of disturbing the peace of a quiet English town. As his thin form came swinging along in the silver light, men and women drew back with looks of alarm to let him pass, and Cargrim, not wishing to have trouble with the drunken bully, slipped into the shadow of a house until he passed. As usual, there was no policeman visible, and Jentham went bellowing and storming through the quiet summer night like the dissolute ruffian he was. He was making for the country in the direction of the palace, and wondering if he intended to force his way into the house to threaten Dr Pendle, the chaplain followed immediately behind. But he was careful to keep out of sight, as Jentham was in just the excited frame of mind to draw a knife: and Cargrim, knowing his lawless nature, had little doubt but that he had one

concealed in his boot or trouser belt. The delicate coward shivered at the idea of a rough-and-tumble encounter with an armed buccaneer.

On went Jentham, swinging his arms with mad gestures, and followed by the black shadow of the chaplain, until the two were clear of the town. Then the gipsy turned down a shadowy lane, cut through a footpath, and when he emerged again into the broad roadway, found himself opposite the iron gates of the episcopalian park. Here he stopped singing and shook his fist at them.

'Come out, you devil-dodger!' he bellowed savagely. 'Come out and give me money, or I'll shame you before the whole town, you clerical hypocrite.' Then he took a pull at a pocket-flask.

Cargrim listened eagerly in the hope of hearing something definite, and Jentham gathered himself together for further denunciation of the bishop, when round the corner tripped two women, towards whom his drunken attention was at once attracted. With a hoarse chuckle he reeled towards them.

'Come along m' beauty,' he hiccuped, stretching out his arms, 'here's your haven. Wine and women! I love them both.'

The women both shrieked, and rushed along the road, pursued by the ruffian. Just as he laid rude hands on the last one, a young man came racing along the footpath and swung into the middle of the road. The next moment Jentham lay sprawling on his back, and the lady assaulted was clinging to the arm of her preserver.

'Why, it's Mab!' said the young man in surprise.

'George!' cried Miss Arden, and burst into tears. 'Oh, George!'

'Curse you both!' growled Jentham, rising slowly. 'I'll be even with you for that blow, my lad.'

'I'll kick you into the next field if you don't clear out,' retorted George Pendle. 'Did he hurt you, Mab?'

'No! no! but I was afraid. I was at Mrs Tears, and was coming home with Ellen, when that man jumped on to us. Oh! oh! oh!'

'The villain!' cried Captain Pendle; 'who is he?'

It was at this moment that, all danger being over, Cargrim judged it judicious to emerge from his retreat. He came forward hurriedly, as though he had just arrived on the scene.

'What is the matter?' he exclaimed. 'I heard a scream. What, Captain Pendle! Miss Arden! This is indeed a surprise.'

'Captain Pendle!' cried Jentham. 'The son of the bishop. Curse him!'

George whirled his stick and made a dash at the creature, but was restrained by Mab, who implored him not to provoke further quarrels.

George took her arm within his own, gave a curt nod to the chaplain, whom he suspected

had seen more of the affray than he chose to admit, and flung a word to Jentham.

'Clear out, you dog!' he said, 'or I'll hand you over to the police. Come, Mab, yonder is Ellen waiting for you. We'll join her, and I shall see you both home.'

Jentham stood looking after the three figures with a scowl. 'You'll hand me over to the police, George Pendle, will you?' he muttered, loud enough for Cargrim to overhear. 'Take care I don't do the same thing to your father,' and like a noisome and dangerous animal he crept back in the shadow of the hedge and disappeared.

'Aha!' chuckled Cargrim, as he walked towards the park gates, 'it has to do with the police, then, my lord bishop. So much the better for me, so much the worse for you.'

CHAPTER X

MORNING SERVICE IN THE MINSTER

THE cathedral is the glory of Beorminster, of the county, and, indeed, of all England, since no churches surpass it in size and splendour, save the minsters of York and Canterbury. Founded and endowed by Henry II. in 1184 for the glory of God, it is dedicated to the blessed Saint Wulf of Osserton, a holy hermit of Saxon times, who was killed by the heathen Danes. Bishop Gandolf designed the building in the picturesque style of Anglo-Norman architecture; and as the original plans have been closely adhered to by successive prelates, the vast fabric is the finest example extant of the Norman superiority in architectural science. It was begun by Gandolf in 1185, and finished at the beginning of the present century; therefore, as it took six hundred years in building, every portion of it is executed in the most perfect manner. It is renowned both for its beauty and sanctity, and forms one of the most splendid memorials of architectural art and earnest faith to be found even in England, that land of fine churches.

The great central tower rises to the height of two hundred feet in square massiveness, and from this point springs a slender and graceful spire to another hundred feet, so that next to Salisbury, the great archetype of this special class of ecclesiastical architecture, it is the tallest spire in England. Two square towers, richly ornamented, embellish the western front, and beneath the great window over the central entrance is a series of canopied arches. The church is cruciform in shape, and is built of Portland stone, the whole being richly ornamented with pinnacles, buttresses, crocketted spires and elaborate tracery. Statues of saints, kings, queens and bishops are placed in niches along the northern and southern fronts, and the western front itself is sculptured with scenes from Holy Scripture in the quaint gro-

tesque style of mediæval art. No ivy is permitted to conceal the beauties of the building ; and elevated in the clear air, far above the smoke of the town, it looks as fresh and white and clean cut as though it had been erected only within the last few years. Spared by Henry VIII. and the iconoclastic rage of the Puritans, Time alone has dealt with it ; and Time has mellowed the whole to a pale amber hue which adds greatly to the beauty of the mighty fane. *Beorminster Cathedral* is a poem in stone.

Within, the nave and transepts are lofty and imposing, with innumerable arches springing from massive marble pillars. The rood screen is ornate, with figures of saints and patriarchs ; the pavement is diversified with brasses and carved marble slabs, and several Crusaders' tombs adorn the side chapels. The many windows are mostly of stained glass, since these were not destroyed by the Puritans ; and when the sun shines on a summer's day the twilight interior is dyed with rich hues and quaint patterns. As the Bishop of Beorminster is a High Churchman, the altar is magnificently decorated, and during service, what with the light and colour and brilliancy, the vast building seems—unlike the dead aspect of many of its kind—to be filled with life and movement and living faith. A Romanist might well imagine that he was attending one of the magnificent and imposing services of his own faith, save that the uttered words are spoken in the mother tongue.

As became a city whose whole existence depended upon the central shrine, the services at the cathedral were invariably well attended. The preaching attracted some, the fine music many, and the imposing ritual introduced by Bishop Pendle went a great way towards bringing worshippers to the altar. A cold, frigid, undecorated service, appealing more to the intellect than the senses, would not have drawn together so vast and attentive a congregation ; but the warmth and colour and musical fervour of the new ritual lured the most careless within the walls of the sacred building. Bishop Pendle was right in his estimate of human nature ; for when the senses are enthralled by colour and sound, and vast spaces, and symbolic decorations, the reverential feeling thus engendered prepares the mind for the reception of the sublime truths of Christianity. A pure faith and a gorgeous ritual are not so incompatible as many people think. God should be worshipped with pomp and splendour ; we should bring to His service all that we can invent in the way of art and beauty. If God has prepared for those who believe the splendid habitation of the New Jerusalem with its gates of pearl and its streets of gold, why should we, His creatures, stint our gifts in His service, and debar the beautiful things, which He inspires us to create with brain and hand, from use in His holy temple ? 'Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh,'

and out of the fulness of the hand the giver should give. 'Date et dabitur !' The great Luther was right in applying this saying to the church.

One of the congregation at St Wulf's on this particular morning was Captain George Pendle, and he came less for the service than in the hope—after the manner of those in love—of meeting with Mab Arden. During the reading of the lessons his eyes were roving here and there in search of that beloved face, but much to his dismay he could not see it. Finally, on a chair near a pillar, he caught sight of Miss Whichello in her poke bonnet and black silk cloak, but she was alone, and there were no bright eyes beside her to send a glance in the direction of George. Having ascertained beyond all doubt that Mab was not in the church, and believing that she was unwell after the shock of Jentharn's attack on the previous night, George withdrew his attention from the congregation, and settled himself to listen attentively to the anthem. It was worthy of the cathedral, and higher praise cannot be given. 'I have blotted out as a thick cloud,' sang the boy soloist in a clear sweet treble, 'I have blotted out thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins.' Then came the triumphant cry of the choir, borne on the rich waves of sound rolling from the organ, 'Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee.' The lofty roof reverberated with the melodious thunder, and the silvery altos pierced through the great volume of sound like arrows of song. 'Return ! Return ! Return !' called the choristers louder and higher and clearer, and ended, with a magnificent burst of harmony, with the sublime proclamation, 'The Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel !' When the white-robed singers resumed their seats, the organ still continued to peal forth triumphant notes, which died away in gentle murmurs. It was like the passing by of a tempest ; the stilling of the ocean after a storm.

Mr Cargrim preached the sermon, and with a vivid recollection of his present enterprise, waxed eloquent on the ominous text, 'Be sure thy sin will find thee out.' His belief that the bishop was guilty of some crime, for the concealment of which he intended to bribe Jentharn, had been strengthened by an examination on that very morning of the cheque-book. Dr Pendle had departed on horseback for Southberry after an early breakfast, and after hurriedly despatching his own, Cargrim had hastened to the library. Here, as he expected, he found the cheque-book carelessly left in an unlocked drawer of the desk, and on looking over it he found that one of the butts had been torn out. The previous butt bore a date immediately preceding that of Dr Pendle's departure for London, so Cargrim had little difficulty in concluding that the bishop had drawn the next cheque in London, and had torn out the butt to which it had been attached,

This showed, as the chaplain very truly thought, that Dr Pendle was desirous of concealing not only the amount of the cheque—since he had kept no note of the sum on the butt—but of hiding the fact that the cheque had been drawn at all. This conduct, coupled with the fact of Jentharn's allusion to Tom Tiddler's ground, and his snatch of extempore song, confirmed Cargrim in his suspicions that Pendle had visited London for the purpose of drawing out a large sum of money, and intended to pay the same over to Jentharn that very night on Southberry Heath. With this in his mind it was no wonder that Cargrim preached a stirring sermon. He repeated his warning text over and over again ; he illustrated it in the most brilliant fashion ; and his appeals to those who had secret sins, to confess them at once, were quite heartrending in their pathos. As most of his congregation had their own little peccadilloes to worry over, Mr Cargrim's sermon made them quite uneasy, and created a decided sensation, much to his own gratification. If Bishop Pendle had only been seated on his throne to hear that sermon, Cargrim would have been thoroughly satisfied. But, alas ! the bishop—worthy man—was confirming innocent sinners at Southberry, and thus lost any chance he might have had of profiting by his chaplain's eloquence.

However, the congregation could not be supposed to know the secret source of the chaplain's eloquence, and his withering denunciations were supposed to arise from a consciousness of his own pure and open heart. The female admirers of Cargrim particularly dwelt in after-church gossip on this presumed cause of the excellent sermon they had heard, and when the preacher appeared he was congratulated on all sides. Miss Tancred for once forgot her purse story, and absolutely squeaked in the highest of keys, in her efforts to make the young man understand the amount of pleasure he had given her. Even Mrs Pansey was pleased to express her approval of so well chosen a text, and looked significantly at several of her friends as she remarked that she hoped they would take its warning to heart.

George came upon his father's chaplain, grinning like a heathen idol, in the midst of a tempestuous ocean of petticoats, and the bland way in which he sniffed up the incense of praise showed how grateful such homage was to his vain nature. At that moment he saw himself a future bishop, and that at no very great distance of time. Indeed, had the election of such a prelate been in the hands of his admirers, he would have been elevated that very moment to the nearest vacant episcopal throne. Captain Pendle looked on contemptuously at this priest-worship.

'The sneaking cad !' he thought, sneering at the excellent Cargrim. 'I dare say he thinks he is the greatest man in Beorminster just now. He looks as though butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.'

There was no love lost between the chaplain and the captain, for on several occasions the latter had found Cargrim a slippery customer, and lax in his notions of honour ; while the curate, knowing that he had not been clever enough to hoodwink George, hated him with all the fervour and malice of his petty soul. However, he hoped soon to have the power to wound Captain Pendle through his father, so he could afford to smile blandly in response to the young soldier's contemptuous look. And he smiled more than ever when brisk Miss Whichello, with her small face, ruddy as a winter apple, marched up and joined in the congratulations.

'In future I shall call you Boanerges, Mr Cargrim,' she cried, her bright little eyes dancing. 'You quite frightened me. I looked into my mind to see what sins I had committed.'

'And found none, I'm sure,' said the courtly chaplain.

'You would have found one if you had looked long enough,' growled Mrs Pansey, who hated the old maid as a rival practitioner amongst the poor, 'and that is, you did not bring your niece to hear the sermon. I don't call such carelessness Christianity.'

'Don't look at my sins through a microscope, Mrs Pansey. I did not bring Mab because she is not well.'

'Oh, really, dear Miss Whichello,' chimed in Daisy Norsham. 'Why, I thought that your sweet niece looked the very picture of health. All those strong, tall women do ; not like poor little me.'

'You need dieting,' retorted Miss Whichello, with a disparaging glance. 'Your face is pale and pasty ; if it isn't powder, it's bad digestion.'

'Miss Whichello !' cried the outraged spinster.

'I'm an old woman, my dear, and you must allow me to speak my mind. I'm sure Mrs Pansey always does.'

'You need not be so very unpleasant ! No, really !'

'The truth is always unpleasant,' said Mrs Pansey, who could not forbear a thrust even at her own guest, 'but Miss Whichello doesn't often hear it,' with a dig at her rival. 'Come away, Daisy. Mr Cargrim, next time you preach take for your text, "The tongue is a two-edged sword."'

'Do, Mr Cargrim,' cried Miss Whichello, darting an angry glance at Mrs Pansey, 'and illustrate it with the one to whom it particularly applies.'

'Ladies ! ladies !' remonstrated Cargrim, while both combatants ruffled their plumes like two fighting cocks, and the more timid of the spectators scuttled out of the way. How the situation would have ended it is impossible to say, as the two ladies were equally matched, but George saved it by advancing to greet Miss Whichello. When the little woman saw him,

she darted forward and shook his hand with unfeigned warmth.

'My dear Captain Pendle,' she cried, 'I am so glad to see you; and thank you for your noble conduct of last night.'

'Why, Miss Whichello, it was nothing,' murmured the modest hero.

'Indeed, I must say it was very valiant,' said Cargrim, graciously. 'Do you know, ladies, that Miss Arden was attacked last night by a tramp and Captain Pendle knocked him down?'

'Oh, really! how very sweet!' cried Daisy, casting an admiring look on George's handsome face, which appealed to her appreciation of manly beauty.

'What was Miss Arden doing to place herself in the position of being attacked by a tramp?' asked Mrs Pansey, in a hard voice. 'This must be looked into.'

'Thank you, Mrs Pansey, I have looked into it myself,' said Miss Whichello. 'Captain Pendle, come home with me to luncheon and tell me all about it; Mr Cargrim, you come also.'

Both gentlemen bowed and accepted, the former because he wished to see Mab, the latter because he knew that Captain Pendle did not want him to come. As Miss Whichello moved off with her two guests, Mrs Pansey exclaimed in a loud voice,—

'Poor young men! Luncheon indeed! They will be starved. I know for a fact that she weighs out the food in scales.' Then, having had the last word, she went home in triumph.

CHAPTER XI

MISS WHICHELLO'S LUNCHEON-PARTY

THE little lady trotted briskly across the square, and guided her guests to a quaint old house squeezed into one corner of it. Here she had been born some sixty odd years before; here she had lived her life of spinsterhood, save for an occasional visit to London; and here she hoped to die, although at present she kept Death at a safe distance by hygienic means and dietary treatment. The house was a queer survival of three centuries, with a pattern of black oak beams let into a white-washed front. Its roof shot up into a high gable at an acute angle, and was tiled with red clay squares, mellowed by Time to the hue of rusty iron. A long lattice with diamond panes, and geraniums in flower-pots behind them, extended across the lower storey; two little jutting windows, also of the criss-cross pattern, looked like two eyes in the second storey; and high up in the third, the casement of the attic peered out coyly from under the eaves. At the top of a flight of immaculately white steps there was a squat little

door painted green and adorned with a brass knocker burnished to the colour of fine gold. The railings of iron round the area were also coloured green, and the appearance of the whole exterior was as spotless and neat as Miss Whichello herself. It was an ideal house for a dainty old spinster such as she was, and rested in the very shadow of the Bishop Gandolf's cathedral like the nest of a bright-eyed wren.

'Mab, my dear!' cried the wren herself, as she led the gentlemen into the drawing-room, 'I have brought Captain Pendle and Mr Cargrim to luncheon.'

Mab arose out of a deep chair and laid aside the book she was reading. 'I saw you crossing the square, Captain Pendle,' she said, shaking his hand. 'Mr Cargrim, I am glad to see you.'

'Are you not glad to see me?' whispered George, in low tones.

'Do you need me to tell you so?' was Mab's reply, with a smile, and that smile answered his question.

'Oh, my dear, such a heavenly sermon!' cried Miss Whichello, fluttering about the room; 'it went to my very heart.'

'It could not have gone to a better place,' replied the chaplain, in the gentle voice which George particularly detested. 'I am sorry to hear you have suffered from your alarm last night, Miss Arden.'

'My nerves received rather a shock, Mr Cargrim, and I had such a bad headache that I decided to remain at home. I must receive your sermon second-hand from my aunt.'

'Why not first-hand from me?' said Cargrim, insinuatingly, whereupon Captain George pulled his moustache and looked savage.

'Oh, I won't tax your good nature so far,' rejoined Mab, laughing. 'What is it, aunty?' for the wren was still fluttering and restless.

'My dear, you must content yourself with Captain Pendle till luncheon, for I want Mr Cargrim to come into the garden and see my fig tree; real figs grow on it, Mr Cargrim,' said Miss Whichello, solemnly, 'the very first figs that have ever ripened in Beorminster.'

'I am glad it is not a barren fig tree,' said Cargrim, introducing a scriptural allusion in his most clerical manner.

'Barren indeed! it has five figs on it. Really, sitting under its shade one would fancy one was in Palestine. Do come, Mr Cargrim,' and Miss Whichello fluttered through the door like an escaping bird.

'With pleasure; the more so, as I know we shall not be missed.'

'Darn!' muttered Captain Pendle, when the door closed on Cargrim's smile and insinuating looks.

'Captain Pendle!' exclaimed Miss Arden, becomingly shocked.

'Captain Pendle indeed!' said the young man, slipping his arm round Mab; 'and why not George?'

'I thought Mr Cargrim might hear.'

'He ought to; like the ass, his ears are long enough.'

'Still, he is anything but an ass—George.'

'If he isn't an ass he's a beast,' rejoined Pendle, promptly, 'and it comes to much the same thing.'

'Well, you need not swear at him.'

'If I didn't swear I'd kick him, Mab; and think of the scandal to the Church. Cargrim's a sneaking, time-serving sycophant. I wonder my father can endure him; I can't!'

'I don't like him myself,' confessed Mab, as they seated themselves in the window-seat.

'I should — think — not!' cried Captain George, in so deliberate and disgusted a tone that Mab laughed. Whereat he kissed her and was reproved, so that both betook themselves to argument as to the righteousness or unrighteousness of kissing on a Sunday.

George Pendle was a tall, slim, and very good-looking young man in every sense of the word. He was as fair as Mab was dark, with bright blue eyes and a bronzed skin, against which his smartly-pointed moustache appeared by contrast almost white. With his upright figure, his alert military air, and merry smile, he looked an extremely handsome and desirable lover; and so Mab thought, although she reproved him with orthodox modesty for snatching a kiss unasked. But if men had to request favours of this sort, there would not be much kissing in the world. Moreover, stolen kisses, like stolen fruit, have a piquant flavour of their own.

The quaint old drawing-room, with its low ceiling and twilight atmosphere, was certainly an ideal place for love-making. It was furnished with chairs, and tables, and couches, which had done duty in the days of Miss Whichello's grandparents; and if the carpet was old, so much the better, for its once brilliant tints had faded into soft hues more restful to the eye. In one corner stood the grandfather of all pianos, with a front of drawn green silk fluted to a central button; beside it a prim canterbury, filled with primly-bound books of yellow-paged music, containing, 'The Battle of the Prague,' 'The Maiden's Prayer,' 'Cherry Ripe,' and 'The Canary Bird's Quadrilles.' Such tinkling melodies had been the delight of Miss Whichello's youth, and—as she had a fine finger for the piano (her own observation)—she sometimes tinkled them now on the jingling old piano when old friends came to see her. Also there were Chippendale cupboards with glass doors, filled with a most wonderful collection of old china—older even than their owner; Chinese jars heaped up with dried rose leaves spreading around a perfume of dead summers; bright silken screens from far Japan; foot-stools and fender-stools worked in worsted which tripped up the unwary; and a number of oil-paintings valuable rather for

age than beauty. None of your modern flimsy drawing-rooms was Miss Whichello's, but a dear, delightful, cosy room full of faded splendours and relics of the dead and gone so dearly beloved. From the yellow silk firescreen swinging on a rosewood pole, to the drowsy old canary chirping feebly in his brass cage at the window, all was old-world and marvellously proper and genteel. Withal, a quiet, perfumed room, delightful to make love in, to the most beautiful woman in the world, as Captain George Pendle knew very well.

'Though it really isn't proper for you to kiss me,' observed Mab, folding her slender hands on her white gown. 'You know we are not engaged.'

'I know nothing of the sort, my dearest prude. You are the only woman I ever intend to marry. Have you any objections? If so, I should like to hear them.'

'I am two years older than you, George.'

'A man is as old as he looks, a woman as she feels. I am quite convinced, Miss Arden, that you feel nineteen years of age, so the disparity rests rather on my shoulders than on yours.'

'You don't look old,' laughed Mab, letting her hand lie in that of her lover's.

'But I feel old—old enough to marry you, my dear. What is your next objection?'

'Your father does not know that you love me.'

'My mother does; Lucy does; and with two women to persuade him, my dear, kind old father will gladly consent to the match.'

'I have no money.'

'My dearest, neither have I. Two negatives make an affirmative, and that affirmative is to be uttered by you when I ask if I may tell the bishop that you are willing to become a soldier's wife.'

'Oh, George!' cried Mab, anxiously, 'it is a very serious matter. You know how particular your father is about birth and family. My parents are dead; I never knew them; for my father died before I was born, and my mother followed him to the grave when I was a year old. If my dear mother's sister had not taken charge of me and brought me up, I should very likely have gone on the parish; for—as aunty says—my parents were paupers.'

'My lovely pauper, what is all this to me? Here is your answer to all the nonsense you have been talking,' and George, with the proverbial boldness of a soldier, laid a fond kiss on the charming face so near to his own.

'Oh, George!' began the scandalised Mab, for the fifth time at least, and was about to reprove her audacious lover again, when Miss Whichello bustled into the room, followed by the black shadow of the parson. George and Mab sprang apart with alacrity, and each wondered, while admiring the cathedral opposite, if Miss Whichello or Cargrim had heard the sound of that stolen kiss. Apparently

the dear, unsuspecting old Jenny Wren had not, for she hopped up to the pair in her bird-like fashion, and took George's arm.

'Come, good people,' she said, briskly, 'luncheon is ready; and so are your appetites, I've no doubt. Mr Cargrim, take in my niece.'

In five minutes the quartette were seated round a small table in Miss Whichello's small dining-room. The apartment was filled with oak furniture black with age and wondrously carved; the curtains and carpet and cushions were of faded crimson rep, and as the gaily-striped sun-blinds were down, the whole was enwrapped in a sober brown atmosphere restful to the eye and cool to the skin. The oval table was covered with a snow-white cloth, on which sparkled silver and crystal round a Nankin porcelain bowl of blue and white filled with deep red roses. The dinner-plates were of thin china, painted with sprawling dragons in yellow and green; the food, in spite of Mrs Pansey's report, was plentiful and dainty, and the wines came from the stock laid down by the father of the hostess in the days when dignitaries of the Church knew what good wine was. It is true that a neat pair of brass scales was placed beside Miss Whichello, but she used them to weigh out such portions of food as she judged to be needful for herself, and did not mar her hospitality by interfering with the appetites of her guests. The repast was tempting, the company congenial, and the young two men enjoyed themselves greatly. Miss Whichello was an entertainer worth knowing, if only for her cook.

'Mab, my dear,' cried the lively old lady, 'I am ashamed of your appetite. Don't you feel better for your morning's rest?'

'Much better, thank you, aunty, but it is too hot to eat.'

'Try some salad, my love; it is cool and green, and excellent for the blood. If I had my way, people should eat more green stuff than they do.'

'Like so many Nebuchadnezzars,' suggested Cargrim, always scriptural.

'Well, some kinds of grass are edible, you know, Mr Cargrim; although we need not go on all fours to eat them as he did.'

'So many people would need to revert to their natural characters of animals if that custom came in,' said George, smiling.

'A certain great poet remarked that everyone had a portion of the nature of some animal,' observed Cargrim, 'especially women.'

'Then Mrs Pansey is a magpie,' cried Mab, with an arch look at her aunt.

'She is a magpie, and a fox, and a laughing hyena, my dear.'

'Oh, aunty, what a trinity!'

'I suppose, Cargrim, all you black-coated parsons are rooks,' said George.

'No doubt, captain; and you soldiers are lions.'

'Aunty is a Jenny Wren!'

'And Mab is a white peacock,' said Miss Whichello, with a nod.

'Captain Pendle, protect me,' laughed Miss Arden. 'I decline to be called a peacock.'

'You are a golden bird of paradise, Miss Arden.'

'Ah, that is a pretty compliment, Captain Pendle. Thank you!'

While George laughed, Cargrim, rather tired of these zoological comparisons, strove to change the subject by an allusion to the adventure of the previous night. 'The man who attacked you was certainly a wolf,' he said decisively.

'Who was the man?' asked Miss Whichello, carefully weighing herself some cheese.

'Some tramp who had been in the wars,' replied George, carelessly; 'a discharged soldier, I daresay. At least, he had a long red scar on his villainous-looking face. I saw it in the moonlight, marking him as with the brand of Cain.'

'A scar!' repeated Miss Whichello, in so altered a tone that Cargrim stared at her, and hastened to explain further, so as to learn, if possible, the meaning of her strange look.

'A scar on the right cheek,' he said slowly, 'from the ear to the mouth.'

'What kind of a looking man is he?' asked the old lady, pushing away her plate with a nervous gesture.

'Something like a gipsy—lean, tall and swarthy, with jet-black eyes and an evil expression. He talks like an educated person.'

'You seem to know all about him, Cargrim,' said Captain Pendle, in some surprise, while Miss Whichello, her rosy face pale and scared, sat silently staring at the tablecloth.

'I have several times been to an hotel called The Derby Winner,' explained the chaplain, 'to see a sick woman; and there I came across this scamp several times. He stays there, I believe!'

'What is his name?' asked Miss Whichello, hoarsely.

'Jenthal, I have been informed.'

'Jenthal! I don't know the name.'

'I don't suppose you know the man either, aunty?'

'No, my love,' replied Miss Whichello, in a low voice. 'I don't suppose I know the man either. Is he still at The Derby Winner, Mr Cargrim?'

'I believe so; he portions his time between that hotel and a gipsy camp on Southberry Common.'

'What is he doing here?'

'Really, my dear lady, I do not know.'

'Aunty, one would think you knew the man,' said Mab, amazed at her aunt's emotion.

'No, Mab, I do not,' said Miss Whichello, vehemently; 'more so than the remark warranted. But if he attacks people on the high road he should certainly be shut up. Well, good people,' she added, with

an attempt at her former lively manner, 'if you are finished we will return to the drawing-room.'

All attempts to restore the earlier harmony of the visit failed, for the conversation languished and Miss Whichello was silent and distraught. The young men shortly took their leave, and the old lady seemed glad to be rid of them. Outside, George and Cargrim separated, as neither was anxious for the other's company. As the chaplain walked to the palace he reflected on the strange conduct of Miss Whichello.

'She knows something about Jentharn,' he thought. 'I wonder if she has a secret also.'

CHAPTER XII

BELL MOSK PAYS A VISIT

ALTHOUGH the palace was so near Beominster, and the sphere of Gabriel's labours lay in the vicinity of the cathedral, Bishop Pendle did not judge it wise that his youngest son should dwell beneath the paternal roof. To teach him independence, to strengthen his will and character, and because he considered that a clergyman should, to a certain extent, share the lot of those amongst whom he laboured, the bishop arranged that Gabriel should inhabit lodgings in the old town, not far from The Derby Winner. It was by reason of this contiguity that Gabriel became acquainted with the handsome barmaid of the hotel, and as he was a more weak-natured man than his father dreamed of, it soon came about that he fell in love with the girl. Matters between them had gone much further than even Cargrim with all his suspicions guessed, for in the skilful hands of Miss Mosk the curate was as clay, and for some time he had been engaged to his charmer. No one knew this, not even Mrs Mosk, for the fair Bell was quite capable of keeping a secret; but Gabriel was firmly bound to her by honour, and Bell possessed a ring, which she kept in the drawer of her looking-glass and wore in secret, as symbolic of an engagement she did not dare to reveal.

On Sunday evening she arrayed herself in her best garments, and putting on this ring, told her mother that she was going to church. At first Mrs Mosk feebly objected, as her husband was away in Southberry and would not be back all night; but as Bell declared that she wanted some amusement after working hard at pulling beer all the week, Mrs Mosk gave way. She did not approve of Bell's mention of evening service as amusement, but she did approve of her going to church, so when the young lady had exhibited herself to the invalid in all her finery, she went away in the greatest good-humour. As the evening was hot, she had put on a dress of pale blue muslin adorned with white ribbons, a straw hat with many

flowers and feathers, and to finish off her costume, her gloves and shoes and sunshade were white. As these cool colours rather toned down the extreme red of her healthy complexion, she really looked very well; and when Gabriel saw her seated in a pew near the pulpit, behaving as demurely as a cat that is after cream, he could not but think how pretty and pious she was. It was probably the first time that piety had ever been associated with Bell's character, although she was not a bad girl on the whole; but that Gabriel should gift her with such a quality showed how green and innocent he was as regards the sex.

The church in which he preached was an ancient building at the foot of the hill, crowned by the cathedral. It was built of rough, grey stone, in the Norman style of architecture, and very little had been done to adorn it either within or without, as the worshippers were few and poor, and Low Church in their tendencies. Those who liked pomp and colour and ritual could find all three in the minster, so there was no necessity to hold elaborate services in this grey, cold, little chapel. In her heart Bell preferred the cathedral with its music and choir, its many celebrants and fashionable congregation, but out of diplomacy she came to sit under Gabriel and follow him as her spiritual guide. Nevertheless, she thought less of him in this capacity, than as a future husband likely to raise her to a position worthy of her beauty and merits, of both of which she entertained a most excellent opinion.

As usual, the pews were half empty, but Gabriel, being a devout parson, performed the service with much earnestness. He read the lessons, lent his voice to the assistance of the meagre choir, and preached a short but sensible discourse which pleased everyone. Bell did not hear much of it, for her mind was busy with hopes that Gabriel would shortly induce his father to receive her as a daughter-in-law. It is true that she saw difficulties in the way, but, to a clever woman like herself, she did not think them unconquerable. Having gone so far as to engage herself to the young man, she was determined to go the whole length and benefit as much as possible for her sacrifice—as she thought it—of accepting the somewhat trying position of a curate's wife. With her bold good looks and aggressive love of dress and amusement, Bell was hardly the type likely to do credit to a parsonage. But any doubts on that score never entered her vain mind.

When the service was over, and the sparse congregation had dwindled away, she went round to the vestry and asked Jarper, the cross old verger, if she could see Mr Pendle. Jarper, who took a paternal interest in the curate, and did not like Miss Mosk over much, since she stinted him of his full measure of beer when he patronised her father's hotel, replied in surly tones that Mr Pendle was tired and would see no one.

'But I must see him,' persisted Bell, 'who was as obstinate as a mule. 'My mother is very ill.'

'Then why don't ye stay t'ome and look arter her?'

'She sent me out to ask Mr Pendle to see her, and I want none of your insolence, Jacob Jarper.'

'Don't 'ee be bold, Miss Mosk. I hev bin verger here these sixty year, I hev, an' I don't want to be told my duty by 'sich as you.'

'Such as me indeed!' cried Bell, with a flash of the paternal temper. 'If I wasn't a lady I'd give you a piece of my mind.'

'He! he!' chuckled Jarper, "'pears as yer all ladies by your own way of showin'. Not that yain't andsome—far be it from me to say as you ain't—but Muster Pendle—well, that's a different matter.'

At this moment Gabriel put an end to what threatened to develop into a quarrel by appearing at the vestry door. On learning that Mrs Mosk wished to see him, he readily consented to accompany Bell, but as he had some business to attend to at the church before he went, he asked Bell to wait for a few minutes.

'I'll be some little time, Jarper,' said he kindly to the sour old verger, 'so if you give me the keys I'll lock up and you can go home to your supper.'

'I am hungry, Muster Pendle,' confessed Jarper, 'an' it ain't at my time of life as old folk shud starve. I've locked up the hull church 'ceptin' the vestry door, an' 'eres th' key oft. Be careful with the light an' put it out, Muster Pendle, for if you burns down the church, what good is fine sermons, I'd like to know?'

'It will be all right, Jarper. I'll give you the key to-morrow. Good-night!'

'Good-night, Jarper!' chimed in Bell, in her most stately manner.

'Thankee, Muster Pendle, good-night, but I don't want no beer fro' you this evening, Miss Bell Mosk,' growled the old man, and chuckling over this exhibition of wit he hobbled away to his supper.

'These common people are most insolent,' said Bell, with an affectation of fine ladyism. 'Let us go into the vestry, Gabriel, I wish to speak to you. Oh, you needn't look so scared; there's nobody about, now that old Dot-and-carry-one has gone'—this last in allusion to Jarper's lameness.

'Bell, please, don't use such language,' remonstrated Gabriel, as he conducted her into the vestry; someone might hear.'

'I don't care if someone does,' retorted Miss Mosk, taking a chair near the flaring, spluttering gas jet, 'but I tell you there is no one about. I wouldn't be here alone with you if there were. I'm as careful of my own reputation as I am of yours, I can tell you.'

'Is your mother ill again?' asked Gabriel,

arranging some sheets of paper on the table and changing the conversation.

'Oh, she's no better and no worse. But you'd better come and see her, so that folks won't be talking of my having spoken to you. A cat can't look at a jug in this town without they think she's after the cream.'

'You wish to speak with me, Bell?'

'Yes, I do; come and sit 'longside of me.'

Gabriel, being very much in love, obeyed with the greatest willingness, and when he sat down under the gas jet would have taken Bell in his arms, but that she evaded his clasp. 'There's no time for anything of that sort, my dear,' said she sharply; 'we've got to talk business, you and I, we have.'

'Business! About our engagement?'

'You've hit it, Gabriel; that's the business I wish to understand. How long is this sort of thing going on?'

'What sort of thing?'

'Now, don't pretend to misunderstand me,' cried Bell, with acerbity, 'or you and I shall fall out of the cart. What sort of thing indeed! Why, my engagement to you being kept secret; your pretending to visit mother when it's me you want; my being obliged to hide the ring you gave me from father's eyes; that's the sort of thing, Mr Gabriel Pendle.'

'I know it is a painful position, dearest, but—'

'Painful position!' echoed the girl, contemptuously. 'Oh, I don't care two straws about the painful position. It's the danger I'm thinking about.'

'Danger! What do you mean? Danger from whom?'

'From Mrs Pansey; from Mr Cargrave. She guesses a lot and he knows more than is good for either you or I. I don't want to lose my character.'

'Bell! no one dare say a word against your character.'

'I should think not,' retorted Miss Mosk, firing up. 'I'd have the law on them if they did. I can look after myself, I hope, and there's no man I know likely to get the better of me. I don't say I'm an aristocrat, Gabriel, but I'm an honest girl, and as good a lady as any of them. I'll make you a first-class wife in spite of my bringing up.'

Gabriel kissed her. 'My darling Bell, you are the sweetest and cleverest woman in the world. You know how I adore you.'

Bell knew very well, for she was sharp enough to distinguish between genuine and spurious affection. Strange as it may appear, the refined and educated young clergyman was deeply in love with this handsome, bold woman of the people. Some lovers of flowers prefer full-blown roses, ripe and red, to the most exquisite buds. Gabriel's tastes were the same, and he admired the florid beauty of Bell with all the ardour of his young and impetuous heart. He was blind to her liking for

incongruous colours in dress: he was deaf to her bold expressions and defects in grammar. What lured him was her ripe, rich, exuberant beauty; what charmed him was the flash of her white teeth and the brilliancy of her eyes when she smiled; what dominated him was her strong will and practical way of looking on worldly affairs. Opposite natures are often attracted to one another by the very fact that they are so undeniably unlike, and the very characteristics in Bell which pleased Gabriel were those which he lacked himself.

Undoubtedly he loved her, but, it may be asked, did she love him? and that is the more difficult question to answer. Candidly speaking, Bell had an affection for Gabriel. She liked his good looks, his refined voice, his very weakness of character was not unpleasing to her. But she did not love him sufficiently to marry him for himself alone. What she wished to marry was the gentleman, the clergyman, the son of the Bishop of Beaminster, and unless Gabriel could give her all the pleasures and delights attendant on his worldly position, she was not prepared to become Mrs Gabriel Pendle. It was to make this clear to him, to clinch the bargain, to show that she was willing to barter her milkmaid beauty and strong common sense for his position and possible money, that she had come to see him. Not being bemused with love, Bell Mosk was thoroughly practical, and so spoke very much to the point. Never was there so prosaic an interview.

'Well, it just comes to this,' she said, determinedly, 'I'm not going to be kept in the background serving out beer any longer. If I am worth marrying I am worth acknowledging, and that's just what you've got to do, Gabriel.'

'But my father!' faltered Gabriel, nervously, for he saw in a flash the difficulties of his position.

'What about your father? He can't eat me, can he?'

'He can cut me off with a shilling, my dear. And that's just what he will do if he know's I'm engaged to you. Surely, Bell, with your strong common sense, you can see that for yourself!'

'Of course I see it,' retorted Bell, sharply, for the speech was not flattering to her vanity; 'all the same, something must be done.'

'We must wait.'

'I'm sick of waiting.'

Gabriel rose to his feet and began to pace to and fro. 'You cannot desire our marriage more than I do,' he said fondly. 'I wish to make you my wife in as public a manner as possible. But you know I have only a small income as a curate, and you would not wish us to begin life on a pittance.'

'I should think not. I've had enough of cutting and contriving. But how do you intend to get enough for us to marry on?'

'My father has promised me the rectorship of Heathcroft. The present incumbent is old and cannot possibly live long.'

'I believe he'll live on just to spite us,' grumbled Bell. 'How much is the living worth?'

'Six hundred a year; there is also the rectory, you know.'

'Well, I daresay we can manage on that, Gabriel. Perhaps, after all, it will be best to wait, but I don't like it.'

'Neither do I, my dear. If you like, I'll tell my father and marry you to-morrow.'

'Then you would lose Heathcroft.'

'It's extremely probable I would,' replied Gabriel, dryly.

'In that case we'll wait,' said Bell, springing up briskly. 'I don't suppose that old man is immortal, and I'm willing to stick to you for another twelve months.'

'Bell! I thought you loved me sufficiently to accept any position.'

'I do love you, Gabriel, but I'm not a fool, and I'm not cut out for a poor man's wife. I've had quite enough of being a poor man's daughter. When poverty comes in at the door, love flies out of the window. That's as true as true. No! we'll wait till the old rector dies, but if he lasts longer than twelve months, I'll lose heart and have to look about me for another husband in my own rank of life.'

'Bell,' said Gabriel, in a pained voice, 'you are cruel!'

'Rubbish!' replied the practical barmaid, 'I'm sensible. Now, come and see mother.'

CHAPTER XIII

A STORMY NIGHT

Having given Gabriel plainly to understand the terms upon which she was prepared to continue their secret engagement, Bell kissed him once or twice to soften the rigour of her speech. Then she intimated that she would return alone to The Derby Winner, and that Gabriel could follow after a reasonable interval of time had elapsed. She also explained the meaning of these precautions.

'If the old cats of the town saw you and I walking along on Sunday night,' said she, at the door of the vestry, 'they would screech out that we were keeping company, and in any case would couple our nannies together. If they did, father would make it so warm for me that I should have to tell the truth, and then—well,' added Miss Mosk, with a brilliant smile, 'you know his temper and my temper.'

'You are sure it is quite safe for you to go home alone?' said Gabriel, who was infected with the upper-class prejudice that every

unmarried girl should be provided with a chaperon.

'Safe!' echoed the dauntless Bell, in a tone of supreme contempt. 'My dear Gabriel, I'd be safe in the middle of Timbuctoo!'

'There are many of these rough harvest labourers about here, you know.'

'I'll slap their faces if they speak to me. I'd like to see them try it, that's all. And now, good-bye for the present, dear. I must get home as soon as possible, for there is a storm coming, and I don't want to get my Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes spoilt.'

When she slipped off like a white ghost into the gathering darkness, Gabriel remained at the door and looked up to the fast clouding sky. It was now about nine o'clock, and the night was hot and thundery, and so airless that it was difficult to breathe. Overhead, masses of black cloud, heavy with storm, hung low down over the town, and the earth, panting and worn out with the heat, waited thirstily for the cool drench of the rain. Evidently a witch-tempest was brewing in the halls of heaven on no small scale, and Gabriel wished that it would break at once to relieve the strain from which nature seemed to suffer. Whether it was the fatigue of his day's labour, or the late interview with Bell which depressed him, he did not know, but he felt singularly pessimistic and his mind was filled with premonitions of ill. Like most people with highly-strung natures, Gabriel was easily affected by atmospheric influence, so no doubt the palpable electricity in the dry, hot air depressed his nerves, but whether this was the cause of his restlessness he could not say. He felt anxious and melancholy, and was worried by a sense of coming ill, though what such ill might be, or from what quarter it would come, he knew not. While thus gloomily contemplative, the great bell of the cathedral boomed out nine deep strokes, and the hollow sound breaking in on his reflections made him wake up, shake off his dismal thoughts, and sent him inside to attend to his work. Yet the memory of those forebodings occurred to him often in after days, and read by the light of after events, he was unable to decide whether the expectation of evil, so strongly forced upon him then, was due to natural or supernatural causes. At present he ascribed his anxieties to the disturbed state of the atmosphere.

In the meantime, Bell, who was a healthy young woman, with no nerves to be affected by the atmosphere, walked swiftly homeward along the airless streets. There were few people on their feet, for the night was too close for exercise, and the majority of the inhabitants sat in chairs before their doors, weary and out of temper. Nature and her creatures were waiting for the windows of the firmament to be opened, for the air to be cleansed, for life to be renewed. Bell met none of the harvesters and was not molested

in any way. Had she been spoken to, or hustled, there is no doubt she would have been as good as her word and have slapped her assailant's face. Fortunately, there was no need for her to proceed to such extremes.

At the door of The Derby Winner she was rather surprised to find Miss Whichello waiting for her. The little old lady wore her poke bonnet and old-fashioned black silk cloak, and appeared anxious and nervous, and altogether unlike her usual cheery self. Bell liked Miss Whichello as much as she disliked Mrs Pansey, therefore she greeted her with unfeigned pleasure, although she could not help expressing her surprise that the visitor was in that quarter of the town so late at night. Miss Whichello produced a parcel from under her voluminous cloak and offered it as an explanation of her presence.

'This is a pot of calf's-foot jelly for your mother, Miss Mosk,' she said. 'Mr Cargim came to luncheon at my house to-day, and he told me how ill your mother is. I was informed that she was asleep, so, not wishing to disturb her, I waited until you returned.'

'It is very kind of you to take so much trouble, Miss Whichello,' said Bell, gratefully receiving the jelly. 'I hope you have not been waiting long.'

'Only ten minutes; your servant told me that you would return soon.'

'I have been to church and stopped after service to talk to some friends, Miss Whichello. Won't you come in for a few minutes? I'll see if my mother is awake.'

'Thank you, I'll come in for a time, but do not waken your mother on my account. Sleep is always the best medicine in case of sickness. I hope Mrs Mosk is careful of her diet.'

'Well, she eats very little.'

'That is wise; very little food, but that little nourishing and frequently administered. Give her a cup of beef-tea two or three times in the night, my dear, and you'll find it will sustain the body wonderfully.'

'I'll remember to do so,' replied Bell, gravely, although she had no intention of remaining awake all night to heat beef-tea and dose her mother with it, especially as the invalid was not ill enough for such extreme measures. But she was so touched by Miss Whichello's kindness that she would not have offended her, by scouting her prescription, for the world.

By this time Miss Whichello was seated in a little private parlour off the bar, illuminated by an oil lamp. This Bell turned up, and then she noticed that her visitor looked anxious and ill at ease. Once or twice she attempted to speak, but closed her mouth again. Bell wondered if Mrs Pansey had been at work coupling her name with that of Gabriel's, and whether Miss Whichello had come down to relieve her conscience by warning her against seeing too much of the curate. But, as she knew very well, Miss

Whichello was too nervous and too much of a lady to give her opinion on questions unasked, and therefore, banishing the defiant look which had begun to harden her face, she waited to hear if it was any other reason than bestowing the jelly which had brought the little old spinster to so disreputable a quarter of the town at so untoward an hour. Finally Miss Whichello's real reason for calling came out by degrees, and in true feminine fashion she approached the main point by side issues.

'Is your father in, Miss Mosk?' she asked, clasping and unclasping her hands feverishly on her lap.

'No, Miss Whichello. He rode over this afternoon to Southberry on business, and we do not expect him back till to-morrow morning. Poor father!' sighed Bell, 'he went away in anything but good spirits, for he is terribly worried over money matters.'

'The payment of his rent is troubling him, perhaps!'

'Yes, Miss Whichello. This is an expensive hotel, and the rent is high. We find it so difficult to make the place pay that we are behindhand with the rent. Sir Harry Brace, our landlord, has been very kind in waiting, but we can't expect him to stand out of his money much longer. I'm afraid in the end we'll have to give up *The Derby Winner*. But it is no good my worrying you about our troubles,' concluded Bell, in a more vivacious tone; 'what do you wish to see father about, Miss Whichello? Anything that I can do?'

'Well, my dear, it's this way,' said the old lady, nervously. 'You know that I have a much larger income than I need, and that I am always ready to help the deserving.'

'I know, Miss Whichello! You give help where Mrs Pansey only gives advice. I know who is most thought of; that I do!'

'Mrs Pansey has her own methods of dispensing charity, Miss Mosk.'

'Tracts and interference,' muttered Pell, under her breath; 'meddlesome old tabby that she is.'

'Mr Cargrim was at my house to-day, as I told you,' pursued Miss Whichello, not having heard this remark, 'and he mentioned a man called Jentham as a poor creature in need of help.'

'He's a poor creature, I daresay,' said Miss Mosk, tossing her head, 'for he owes father more money than he can pay, although he does say that he'll settle his bill next week. But he's a bad lot.'

'A bad lot, Miss Mosk?'

'As bad as they make 'em, Miss Whichello. Don't you give him a penny, for he'll only waste it on drink.'

'Does he drink to excess?'

'I should think so; he finishes a bottle of brandy every day.'

'Oh, Miss Mosk, how very dreadful!' cried Miss Whichello, quite in the style of Daisy

Norsham. 'Why is he staying in Beorminster?'

'I don't know, but it's for no good, you may be sure. If he isn't here he's hob-nobbing with those gipsy wretches who have a camp on Southberry Common. Mother Jael and he are always together.'

'Can you describe him?' asked Miss Whichello, with some hesitation.

'He is tall and thin, with a dark, wicked-looking face, and he has a nasty scar on the right cheek, slanting across it to the mouth. But the funny thing is, that with all his rags and drunkenness there is something of the gentleman about him. I don't like him, yet I can't dislike him. He's attractive in his own way from his very wickedness. But I'm sure,' finished Bell, with a vigorous nod, 'that he's a black-hearted Nero. He has done a deal of damage in his time both to men and women; I'm as sure of that as I sit here, though I can give no reason for saying so.'

Miss Whichello listened to this graphic description in silence. She was very pale, and held her handkerchief to her mouth with one trembling hand; the other beat nervously on her lap, and it was only by a strong effort of will that she managed to conquer her emotion.

'I daresay you are right,' she observed, in a tremulous voice. 'Indeed, I might have expected as much, for last night he frightened my niece and her maid on the high road. I thought it would be best to give him money and send him away, so that so evil a man should not remain here to be a source of danger to the town.'

'Give him money!' cried Miss Mosk. 'I'd give him the cat-o'-nine-tails if I had my way. Don't you trouble about him, Miss Whichello; he's no good.'

'But if I could see him I might soften his heart,' pleaded the old lady, very much in earnest.

'Softens a brick-bat,' rejoined Bell; 'you'd have just as much success with one as with the other. Besides, you can't see him, Miss Whichello—at all events, not to-night—for he's on the common with his nasty gipsies, and—won't be back till the morning. I wish he'd stay away altogether, I do.'

'In that case I shall not trouble about him,' said the old lady, rising; 'on some future occasion I may see him. But you need not say I was asking for him, Miss Mosk.'

'I won't say a word; he'd only come worrying round your house if he thought you wanted to give him money.'

'Oh, he mustn't do that; he mustn't come there!' cried Miss Whichello, alarmed.

'He won't, for I'll hold my tongue. You can rest easy on that score, Miss Whichello. But my advice is, don't pick him up out of the mire; he'll only fall back into it again.'

'You have a bad opinion of him, Miss Mosk.'

'The very worst,' replied Bell, conducting her guest to the door; 'he's a gaol bird and a scallywag, and all that's bad. Well, good-night, Miss Whichello, and thank you for the jelly.'

'There is no need for thanks, Miss Mosk. Good-night!' and the old lady tripped up the street, keeping in the middle of it, lest any robber should spring out on her from the shadow of the houses.

The storm was coming nearer, and soon would break directly over the town, for flashes of lightning were weaving fiery patterns against the black clouds, and every now and then a hoarse growl of thunder went grinding across the sky. Anxious to escape the coming downfall, Miss Whichello climbed up the street towards the cathedral as quickly and steadily as her old legs could carry her. Just as she emerged into the close, a shadow blacker than the blackness of the night glided past her. A zig-zag of lightning cut the sky at the moment and revealed the face of Mr Cargrim, who in his turn recognised the old lady in the bluish glare.

'Miss Whichello!' he exclaimed; 'what a surprise!'

'You may well say that, Mr Cargrim,' replied the old lady, with a nervous movement, for the sound of his voice and the sudden view of his face startled her not a little. 'It is not often I am out at this hour, but I have been taking some jelly to Mrs Mosk.'

'You are a good Samaritan, Miss Whichello. I hope she is better?'

'I think so, but I did not see her, as she is asleep. I spoke with her daughter, however.'

'I trust you were not molested by that ruffian Jentham, who stays at The Derby Winner,' said Cargrim, with hypocritical anxiety.

'Oh, no! he is away on Southberry Heath with his gipsy friends, I believe—at least, Miss Mosk told me so. Good-night, Mr Cargrim,' she added, evidently not anxious to prolong the conversation. 'I wish to get under shelter before the storm breaks.'

'Let me see you to your door at least.'

Miss Whichello rejected this officious offer by dryly remarking that she had accomplished the worst part of her journey, and bidding the chaplain 'Good-night,' tripped across the square to her own Jenny Wren nest. Cargrim looked after her with a doubtful look as she vanished into the darkness, then, turning on his heel, walked swiftly down the street towards Eastgate. He had as much aversion to getting wet as a cat, and put his best foot foremost so as to reach the palace before the rain came on. Besides, it was ten o'clock—a late hour for a respectable parson to be abroad.

'She's been trying to see Jentham,' thought Mr Cargrim, recalling Miss Whichello's nervous hesitation. 'I wonder what she knows

about him. The man is a mystery, and is in Beorminster for no good purpose. Miss Whichello and the bishop both know that purpose, I'm certain. Well! well! two secrets are better than one, and if I gain a knowledge of them both, I may inhabit Heathcroft Rectory sooner than I expect.'

Cargrim's meditations were here cut short by the falling of heavy drops of rain, and he put all his mind into his muscles to travel the faster. Indeed he almost ran through the new town, and was soon out on the country road which conducted to the palace. But, in spite of all his speed, the rain caught him, for with an incessant play of lightning and a constant roll of thunder came a regular tropical downpour. The rain descended in one solid mass, flooding the ground and beating flat the crops. Cargrim was drenched to the skin, and by the time he slipped through the small iron gate near the big ones, into the episcopal park, he looked like a lean water-rat. Being in a bad temper from his shower bath, he was almost as venomous as that animal, and raced up the avenue in his sodden clothing, shivering and dripping. Suddenly he heard the quick trot of a horse, and guessing that the bishop was returning, he stood aside in the shadow of the trees to let his superior pass by. Like the chaplain, Dr Pendle was streaming with water, and his horse's hoofs plashed up the sodden ground as though he were crossing a marsh. By the livid glare of the lightnings which shot streaks of blue fire through the descending deluge, Cargrim caught a glimpse of the bishop's face. It was deathly pale, and bore a look of mingled horror and terror. Another moment and he had passed into the blackness of the drenching rain, leaving Cargrim marvelling at the torture of the mind which could produce to terrible an expression.

'It is the face of Cain,' whispered Cargrim to himself. 'What can his secret be?'

CHAPTER XIV

'RUMOUR FULL OF TONGUES'

IT is almost impossible to learn the genesis of a rumour. It may be started by a look, a word, a gesture, and it spreads with such marvellous rapidity that by the time public curiosity is fully aroused, no one can trace the original source, so many and winding are the channels through which it has flowed. Yet there are exceptions to this general rule, especially in criminal cases, where, for the safety of the public, it is absolutely necessary to get to the bottom of the matter. Therefore, the rumour which pervaded Beorminster on Monday morning was soon traced by the police to a carter from Southberry. This man

mentioned to a friend that, when crossing the Heath during the early morning, he had come across the body of a man. The rumour—weak in its genesis—stated first that a man had been hurt, later on that he had been wounded; by noon it was announced that he was dead, and finally the actual truth came out that the man had been murdered. The police authorities saw the carter and were conducted by him to the corpse, which, after examination, they brought to the dead-house in Beaminster. Then all doubt came to an end, and it was officially declared during the afternoon that Jentham, the military vagabond lately resident at The Derby Winner, had been shot through the heart. But even rumour, prolific as it is in invention, could not suggest who had murdered the man.

So unusual an event in the quiet cathedral city caused the greatest excitement, and the streets were filled with people talking over the matter. Amateur detectives, swilling beer in public-houses, gave their opinions about the crime, and the more beer they drank, the wilder and more impossible became their theories. Some suggested that the gypsies camped on Southberry Heath, who were continually fighting amongst themselves, had killed the miserable creature; others, asserting that the scamp was desperately poor, hinted at suicide induced by sheer despair; but the most generally accepted opinion was that Jentham had been killed in some drunken frolic by one or more Irish harvester. The Beaminster reporters visited the police station and endeavoured to learn what Inspector Tinkler thought. He had seen the body, he had viewed the spot where it had been found, he had examined the carter, Giles Crake, so he was the man most likely to give satisfactory answers to the questions as to who had killed the man, and why he had been shot. But Inspector Tinkler was the most wary of officials, and pending the inquest and the verdict of twelve good men and true, he declined to commit himself to an opinion. The result of this reticence was that the reporters had to fall back on their inventive faculties, and next morning published three theories, side by side, concerning the murder, so that the *Beaminster Chronicle* containing these suppositions proved to be as interesting as a police novel, and quite as unreliable. But it amused its readers and sold largely, therefore proprietor and editor were quite satisfied that fiction was as good as fact to tickle the long ears of a credulous public.

As the dead man had lodged at The Derby Winner, and many people had known him there, quite a sensation was caused by the report of his untimely end. From morning till night the public-house was thronged with customers, thirsting both for news and beer. Nevertheless, although business was so brisk, Mosk was by no means in a good temper.

He had returned early that morning from Southberry, and had been one of the first to hear about the matter. When he heard who had been killed, he regarded the committal of the crime quite in a personal light, for the dead man owed him money, and his death had discharged the debt in a way of which Mr Mosk did not approve. He frequently referred to his loss during the day, when congratulated by unthinking customers on the excellent trade the assassination had brought about.

'For, as I allays ses,' remarked one wise-acre, 'it's an ill wind as don't blow good to somebody.'

'Yah!' growled Mosk, in his beery voice, 'it's about as broad as it's long so far as I'm concerned. I've lost a couple of quid through Jentham goin' and gettin' shot, and it will take a good many tankards of bitter at thru'p'nee to make that up.'

'Oo d'y think shot 'im, Mr Mosk?'

'Arsk me sum'min' easier, carn't you? I don't know nothin' about the cove, I don't; he comes 'ere two, three weeks ago, and leaves owin' me money. Where he comes from, or who he is, or what he's bin doin' to get shot I know no more nor you do. All I does know,' finished Mosk, emphatically, 'is as I've lost two bloomin' quid, an' that's a lot to a poor man like me.'

'Well, father, it's no good making a fuss over it,' cried Bell, who overheard his grumbling. 'If Jentham hadn't been shot, we wouldn't be doing so well. For my part, I'm sorry for the poor soul.'

'Poor blackguard, you mean!'

'No, I don't. I don't call any corpse a blackguard. If he was one, I daresay he's being punished enough now without our calling him names. He wasn't the kind of man I fancied, but there's no denying he was attractive in his own wicked way.'

'Ah!' said a dirty-looking man, who was more than suspected of being a welcher, 'couldn't he tell slap-up yarns about H'injins an' eathens as bows down to stocks and stones. Oh, no! not he—'

'He could lie like a one-year-old, if that's what y' mean,' said Mosk.

'Bloomin' fine lyin', any'ow,' retorted the critic. 'I'd git orf the turf if I cud spit 'em out that style; mek m' fortin', I would, on th' paipers.'

'Y've bin chucked orf the turf often enough as it is,' replied the landlord, sourly, whereat, to give the conversation a less personal application, the dirty welcher remarked that he would drain another bitter.

'I suppose you'll be as drunk as a pig by night,' said Bell, taking the order. 'Jentham was bad, but he wasn't a swine like you.'

'Garn! 'e got drunk, didn't he? Oh, no! You bet he didn't.'

'He got drunk like a gentleman, at all events. None of your sauce, Black, or I'll

have you chucked. You know me by this time, I hope.'

In fact, as several of the customers remarked, Miss Bell was in a fine temper that morning, and her tongue raged round like a prairie fire. This bad humour was ascribed by the public to the extra work entailed on her by the sensation caused by the murder, but the true cause lay with Gabriel. He had promised faithfully, on the previous night, to come round and see Mrs Mosk, but, to Bell's anger, had failed to put in an appearance—the first time he had done such a thing. As Miss Mosk's object was always to have an ostensible reason for seeing Gabriel in order to protect her character, she was not at all pleased that he had not turned her excuse for calling on him into an actual fact. It is true that Gabriel presented himself late in the afternoon and requested to see the invalid, but instead of taking him up to the sickroom, Bell whirled the curate into a small back parlour and closed the door, in order, as she remarked, 'to have it out with him.'

'Now, then,' said she, planting her back against the door, 'what do you mean by treating me like a bit of dirt?'

'You mean that I did not come round last night, Bell?'

'Yes, I do. I told mother you would visit her. I said to Jacob Jasper as I'd come to ask you to see mother, and you go and make me out a liar by not turning up. What do you mean?'

'I was ill and couldn't keep my promise,' said Gabriel, shortly.

'Ill!' said Bell, looking him up and down; 'well, you do look ill. You've been washed and wrung out till you're limp as a rag. White in the face, black under the eyes! What have you been doing with yourself, I'd like to know. You were all right when I left you last night.'

'The weather affected my nerves,' explained Gabriel, with a weary sigh, passing his thin hand across his anxious face. 'I felt that it was impossible for me to sit in a close room and talk to a sick woman, so I went round to the stables where I keep my horse, and took him out in order to get a breath of fresh air.'

'What! You rode out at that late hour, in all that storm?'

'The storm came on later. I went out almost immediately after you left, and got back at half-past ten. It wasn't so very late.'

'Well, of all mad things!' said Bell, grimly. 'It's easy seen, Mr Gabriel Pendle, how badly you want a wife at your elbow. Where did you go?'

'I rode out on to Southberry Heath,' replied Gabriel, with some hesitation.

'Lord ha' mercy! Where Jentham's corpse was found? ...

The curate shuddered. 'I didn't see any corpse,' he said, painfully and slowly. 'Instead of keeping to the high road, I struck out cross-country. It was only this morning that I heard of the unfortunate man's untimely end.'

'You didn't meet anyone likely to have laid him out?'

'No! I met no one. I felt too ill to notice passers-by, but the ride did me good, and I feel much better this morning.'

'You don't look better,' said Bell, with another searching glance. 'One would think you had killed the man yourself!'

'Bell!' protested Gabriel, almost in an hysterical tone, for his nerves were not yet under control, and the crude speeches of the girl made him wince.

'Well! well! I'm only joking. I know you wouldn't hurt a fly. But you do look ill, that's a fact. Let me get you some brandy.'

'No, thank you, brandy would only make me worse. Let me go up and see your mother.'

'I sha'n't! You're not fit to see anyone. Go home and lie down till your nerves get right. You can see me after five if you like, for I'm going to the dead-house to have a look at Jentham's body.'

'What! to see the corpse of that unhappy man,' cried Gabriel, shrinking away.

'Why not?' answered Bell, coolly, for she had that peculiar love of looking on dead bodies characteristic of the lower classes. 'I want to see how they killed him.'

'How who killed him?'

'The person as did it, silly. Though I don't know who could have shot him unless it was that old cat of a Mrs Pansey. Well, I can't stay here talking all day, and father will be wondering what I'm up to. You go home and lie down, Gabriel.'

'Not just now. I must walk up to the palace.'

'Hum! The bishop will be in a fine way about this murder. It's years since anyone got killed here. I hope they'll catch the wretch as shot Jentham, though I can't say I liked him myself.'

'I hope they will catch him,' replied Gabriel, mechanically. 'Good-day, Miss Mosk! I shall call and see your mother to-morrow.'

'Good-day, Mr Pendle, and thank you, oh, so much!'

This particular form of farewell was intended for the ears of Mr Mosk and the general public, but it failed in its object so far as the especial person it was intended to impress was concerned. When the black-clothed form of Gabriel vanished, Mr Mosk handed over the business of the bar to an active pot-boy, and conducted his daughter back to the little parlour. Bell saw from his lowering brow that her father was suspicious of her lengthened

interview with the curate, and was bent upon causing trouble. However, she was not the kind of girl to be daunted by black looks, and, moreover, was conscious that her father would be rather pleased than otherwise to hear that she was honourably engaged to the son of Bishop Pendle, so she sat down calmly enough at his gruff command, and awaited the coming storm. If driven into a corner, she intended to tell the truth, therefore she faced her father with the greatest coolness.

'What d'y mean by it?' cried Mosk, bursting into angry words as soon as the door was closed; 'what d'y mean, you hussy?'

'Now, look here, father,' said Bell, quickly, 'you keep a civil tongue in your head or I won't use mine. I'm not a hussy, and you have no right to call me one.'

'No right! Ain't I your lawfully begotten father?'

'Yes, you are, worse luck! I'd have had a duke for my father if I'd been asked what I wanted.'

'Wouldn't a bishop content you?' sneered Mosk, with a scowl on his pimply face.

'You're talking of Mr Pendle, are you?' said Bell, wilfully misunderstanding the situation.

'Yes, I am, you jade! and I won't have it. I tell you I won't!'

'Won't have what, father? Give it a name.'

'Why, this carrying on with that parson chap. Not as I've a word to say against Mr Pendle, because he's worth a dozen of the Cargrim lot, but he's gentry and you're not!'

'What's that got to do with it?' demanded Bell, with supreme contempt.

'This much,' raved Mosk, clenching his fist, 'that I won't have you running after him. D'y hear?'

'I hear; there is no need for you to rage the house down, father. I'm not running after Mr Pendle; he's running after me.'

'That's just as bad. You'll lose your character.'

Bell fired up, and bounced to her feet. 'Who dares to say a word against my character?' she asked, panting and red.

'Old Jarper, for one. He said you went to see Mr Pendle last night.'

'So I did.'

'Oh, you did, did you? and here you've bin talking alone with him this morning for the last hour. What d'y mean by disgracing me?'

'Disgracing you!' scoffed Bell. 'Your character needs a lot of disgracing, doesn't it? Now, be sensible, father,' she added, advancing towards him, 'and I'll tell you the truth. I didn't intend to, but as you are so unreasonable I may as well set your mind at rest.'

'What are you driving at?' growled Mosk, struck by her placid manner.

'Well, to put the thing into a nutshell, Mr Pendle is going to marry me.'

'Marry you! Get along!'

'I don't see why you should doubt my word,' cried Bell, with an angry flush. 'I'm engaged to him as honourably as any young lady could be. He has written me lots of letters promising to make me his wife, he has given me a ring, and we're only waiting till he's appointed to be rector of Heathcroft to marry.'

'Well, I'm d——d,' observed Mr Mosk, slowly. 'Is this true?'

'I'll show you the ring and letters if you like,' said Bell, tartly, 'but I don't see why you should be so surprised. I'm good enough for him, I hope!'

'You're good-lookin', I dessay, Bell, but he's gentry.'

'I'm going to be gentry too, and I'll hold my own with the best of them. As Bishop Pendle's daughter-in-law, I'll scratch the eyes out of any of 'em as doesn't give me my place.'

Mosk drew a long breath. 'Bishop Pendle's daughter-in-law,' he repeated, looking at his daughter with admiration. 'My stars! you are a clever girl, Bell.'

'I'm clever enough to get what I want, father, so long as you don't put your foot into it. Hold your tongue until I tell you when to speak. If the bishop knew of this now, he'd cut Gabriel of with a shilling.'

'Oh, he would, would he?' said Mosk, in so strange a tone that Bell looked at him with some wonder.

'Of course he would,' said she, quietly; 'but when Gabriel is rector of Heathcroft it won't matter. We'll then have money enough to do without his consent.'

'Give me a kiss, my girl,' cried Mosk, clasping her to his breast, 'You're a credit to me, that you are. Oh, curse it! Bell, think of old Mother Pansey!'

Father and daughter looked at one another and burst out laughing.

CHAPTER XV

THE GIPSY RING

ALMOST at the very time Mosk was congratulating his daughter on the conquest of the curate, Captain Pendle was paying a visit to the Jenny Wren nest. He had only succeeded in obtaining a Saturday to Monday leave from his colonel, who did not approve of young officers being too long or too often absent from their duties, and was rejoicing his regiment that very evening. As soon as he could get away from the palace he had left his portmanteau at the station and had come up to the Cathedral Close to see Mab. Much to

his gratification he found her alone in the quaint old drawing-room, and blessed the Providence which had sent him thither at so propitious an hour.

'Aunty is lying down,' explained Mab, who looked rather worried and pale; 'she has been so upset over this horrid murder.'

'Egad! it has upset everyone,' said George, throwing himself into a chair. 'My father is so annoyed at such a thing happening in his diocese that he has retreated to his library and shut himself up. I could hardly get him to say good-bye. Though, upon my word,' added George, waxing warm, 'I don't see that the death of a wretched tramp is of such moment; yet it seems to have annoyed everyone.'

'Including yourself,' said Mab, remarking how worried her lover looked, and how far from being his pleasant, natural self.

'Yes, my dearest, including myself. When the bishop is annoyed my mother fidgets over him until she makes herself ill. Knowing this, he is usually careful not to let her see him when he is out of sorts, but to-day he was not so discreet, and the consequence is that my mother has an attack of nerves, and is lying on her sofa bathed in tears, with Lucy in attendance. Of course, all this has upset me in my turn.'

'Well, George, I suppose it is natural that the bishop should be put out, for such a terrible crime has not been committed here for years. Indeed, the *Chronicle* of last week was remarking how free from crime this place was.'

'And naturally the gods gave them the lie by arranging a first-class murder straight away,' said George, with a shrug. 'But why everybody should be in such a state I can't see. The palace is like an undertaker's establishment when business is dull. The only person who seems at all cheerful is that fellow Cargrim.'

'He ought to be annoyed for the bishop's sake.'

'Faith, then, he isn't, Mab. He's going about rubbing his hands and grinning like a Cheshire cat. I think the sight of him irritated me more than the mourners. I'm g'ad to go back to my work.'

'Are you glad to leave me?'

'No, you dear goose,' said he, taking her hand affectionately; 'that is the bitter drop in my cup. However, I have brought you something to draw us closer together. There!'

'Oh, George!' cried Mab, looking in ecstasy at the ring he had slipped on her finger, 'what a lovely, lovely ring, and what a queer one!—three turquoise stones set in a braid of silver. I never saw so unique a pattern.'

'I daresay not. It's not the kind of ring you'll come across every day, and precious hard work I had to get it.'

'Did you buy it in Beorminster?' asked Miss Arden, putting her head to one side to admire the peculiar setting of the blue stones.

'No; I bought it from Mother Jael.'

'From Mother Jael!—that old gipsy fortune-teller?'

'Precisely; from that very identical old Witch of Endor. I saw it on her lean paw when I was last in Beorminster, and she came hovering round to tell my fortune. The queer look of it took my fancy, and I determined to secure it for our engagement ring. However, the old lady wasn't to be bribed into parting with it, but last night I rode out to the camp on Southberry Common and succeeded in getting it off her. She is a regular Jew at a bargain, and haggled for an hour before she would let me have it. Ultimately I gave her the price she asked, and there it is, on your pretty hand.'

'How sweet of you, George, to take so much trouble! I shall value the ring greatly for your sake.'

'And for your own too, I hope. It is a lucky ring, and came from the East, Mother Jael said, in the old, old days. It looks rather Egyptian, so perhaps Cleopatra wore it when she went to meet Anthony!'

'Such nonsense! but it is a dear, lovely ring, and I'll wear it always.'

'I think I deserve a kiss from you for my trouble,' said George, drawing her lovely, glowing face towards him. 'There, darling; the next ring I place on your finger will be a plain golden one, not from the East, but from an honest Beorminster jeweller.'

'But, George!'—Mab laid her head on his breast—'I am not sure if I ought to accept it, really. Your father does not know of our engagement.'

'I intend to tell him when I next visit Beorminster, my love. Indeed, but that he takes this wretched murder so much to heart I would have told him to-day. Still, you need not scruple to wear it, dearest, for your aunt and my mother are both agreed that you will make me the sweetest of wives.'

'Aunty is always urging me to ask you to tell your father.'

'Then you can inform her that I'll do so next—why, here is your aunt, my dear.'

'Aunty!' cried Mab, as Miss Whichello, like a little white ghost, moved into the room. 'I thought your head was so bad.'

'It is better now, my dear,' replied the old lady, who really looked very ill. 'How do you do, Captain Pendle?'

'Hadn't you better call me George, Miss Whichello?'

'No, I hadn't, my dear man; at least, not until your engagement with Mab is an accomplished fact.'

'But it is an accomplished fact, now, aunty,' said Mab, showing the ring. 'Here is the visible sign of our engagement.'

'A strange ring, but very charming,' pro-

nounced Miss Whichello, examining the jewel.
‘But does the bishop know?’

‘I intend to tell him when I come back next week,’ said George, promptly. ‘At present he is too upset with this murder to pay much attention to my love affairs.’

‘Upset with this murder!’ cried the little lady, dropping into a chair. ‘I don’t wonder at it. I am quite ill with the news.’

‘I’m sure I don’t see why, aunty. This Jentham tramp wasn’t a relative, you know.’

Miss Whichello shuddered, and, if possible, turned paler. ‘He was a human being, Mab,’ she said, in a low voice, ‘and it is terrible to think that the poor wretch, however evil he may have been, should have come to so miserable an end. Is it known who shot him, Captain Pendle?’

‘No; there are all sorts of rumours, of course, but none of them very reliable. It’s a pity, too,’ added George, reflectively, ‘for if I had only been a little earlier in leaving Mother Jael I might have heard the shot and captured the murderer.’

‘What do you mean, Captain Pendle?’ cried Miss Whichello, with a start.

‘Why, didn’t I tell you? No, of course I didn’t; it was Mab I told.’

‘What did you tell her?’ questioned the old lady, with some impatience.

‘That I was on Southberry Heath last night.’

‘What were you doing there?’

‘Seeing after that gipsy ring for Mab,’ explained George, pulling his moustache. ‘I bought it of Mother Jael, and had to ride out to the camp to make the bargain. As I am going back into harness to-day, there wasn’t much time to lose, so I went off last night after dinner, between eight and nine o’clock, and the old jade kept me so long fixing up the business that I didn’t reach home until eleven. By Jove! I got a jolly ducking; looked like an insane river god dripping with wet.’

‘Did you see anything of the murder, Captain Pendle?’

‘No; didn’t even hear the shot, though that wasn’t to be wondered at, considering the row made by rain and thunder.’

‘Where was the body found?’

‘Somewhere in a ditch near the high road, I believe. At all events, it wasn’t in the way, or my gee would have tumbled across it.’

Miss Whichello reflected. ‘The bishop was over at Southberry yesterday, was he not?’ she asked.

‘Yes, at a confirmation service. He rode back across the common, and reached the palace just before I did—about half an hour or so.’

‘Did he hear or see anything?’

‘Not to my knowledge; but the truth is, I haven’t had an opportunity of asking questions. He is so annoyed at the disgrace to the diocese by the committal of this crime that

he’s quite beside himself. I was just telling Mab about it when you came in. Six o’clock!’ cried Captain George, starting up as the chimes rang out. ‘I must be off. If I’m late at barracks my colonel will parade me to-morrow, and go down my throat spurs, boots, and all.’

‘Wait a moment, Captain Pendle, and I’ll come with you.’

‘But your headache, aunty?’ remonstrated Mab.

‘My dear, a walk in the fresh air will do me good. I shall go with Captain Pendle to the station. Make your adieux, young people, while I put on my bonnet and cloak.’

When Miss Whichello left the room, Mab, who had been admiring her ring during the foregoing conversation, was so impressed with its quaint beauty that she again thanked George for having given it to her. This piece of politeness led to an exhibition of tenderness on the part of the departing lover, and during the dragon’s absence this foolish young couple talked the charming nonsense which people in their condition particularly affect. Realism is a very good thing in its own way, but to set down an actual love conversation would be carrying it to excess. Only the exaggerated exaltation of mind attendant on love-making can enable lovers to endure the transcendentalism with which they bore one another. And then the look which makes an arrow of the most trifling phrase, the caress which gives the merest glance a most eloquent meaning—how can prosaic pen and ink and paper report these fittingly? The sympathetic reader must guess what George and Mab said to one another. He must fancy how they said it, and he or she must see in his or her mind’s eye how young and beautiful and glowing they looked when Miss Whichello, as the prose of their poetry, walked into the room. The dear old lady smiled approvingly when she saw their bright faces, for she too had lived in Arcady, although the envious gods had turned her out of it long since.

‘Now, Captain Pendle, when you have done talking nonsense with that child I’m ready.’

‘Do call me George, Miss Whichello,’ entreated the captain.

‘No, sir; not until your father gives this engagement his episcopalian blessing. No nonsense. Come along.’

But Miss Whichello’s bark was worse than her bite, for she discreetly left the room, so that the love-birds could take a tender leave of each other, and Captain Pendle found her standing on the steps outside with a broad smile on her face.

‘You are sure you have not forgotten your gloves, Captain Pendle?’ she asked smilingly.

‘No,’ replied George innocently, ‘I have them with me.’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed Miss Whichello, marching down the steps like a toy soldier, ‘in my

youth young men in your condition *always* forgot their gloves.'

'By Jove ! I have left something behind me, though.'

'Your heart, probably. Never mind, it is in safe keeping. None of your tricks, sir. Come, come !' and Miss Whichello marched the captain off with a twinkle in her bright eyes. The little old lady was one of those loved by the gods, for she would undoubtedly die young in heart.

Still, as she walked with Captain Pendle to the station in the gathering darkness she looked worried and white. George could not see her face in the dusk, and moreover was too much taken up with his late charming interview to notice his companion's preoccupation. In spite of her sympathy, Miss Whichello grew weary of a monologue on the part of George, in which the name of 'Mab' occurred fifty times and more. She was glad when the train steamed off with this too happy lover, and promised to deliver all kinds of unnecessary messages to the girl George had left behind him.

'But let them be happy while they can,' murmured Miss Whichello, as she tripped back through the town. 'Poor souls, if they only knew what I know.'

As Miss Whichello had the meaning of this enigmatic speech in her mind, she did not think it was necessary to put it into words, but, silent and pensive, walked along the crowded pavement. Shortly she turned down a side street which led to the police-station, and there paused in a quiet corner to pin a veil round her head—a veil so thick that her features could hardly be distinguished through it. The poor lady adopted this as a kind of disguise, forgetting that her old-fashioned poke bonnet and quaint silly cloak were as well known to the inhabitants of Beominster as the cathedral itself. That early century garb was as familiar to the rascality of the slums as to the richer citizens; even the police knew it well, for they had often seen its charitable wearer by the bedsides of dying paupers. It thus happened that, when Miss Whichello presented herself at the police-station to Inspector Tinkler, he knew her at once, in spite of her foolish little veil. Moreover, in greeting her he pronounced her name.

'Hush, hush, Mr Inspector,' whispered Miss Whichello, with a mysterious glance around. 'I do not wish it to be known that I called here.'

'You can depend upon my discretion, Miss Whichello, ma'am,' said the inspector, who was a bluff and tyrannical ex-sergeant. 'And what can I do for you ?'

Miss Whichello looked round again. 'I wish, Mr Inspector,' said she, in a very small voice, 'to be taken by you to the dead-house.'

'To the dead-house, Miss Whichello, ma'am !' said the iron Tinkler, hardly able

to conceal his astonishment, although it was against his disciplinarian ideas to show emotion.

'There is a dead man in there, Mr Inspector, whom I knew under very different circumstances more than twenty years ago.'

'Answers to the name of Jentham, perhaps ?' suggested Mr Inspector.

'Yes, he called himself Jentham, I believe. I—I—I wish to see his body ;' and the little old lady looked anxiously into Tinkler's purple face.

'Miss Whichello, ma'am,' said the ex-sergeant with an official air, 'this request requires reflection. Do you know the party in question ?'

'I knew him, as I told you, more than twenty years ago. He was then a very talented violinist, and I heard him play frequently in London.'

'What was his name, Miss Whichello, ma'am ?'

'His name then, Mr Inspector, was Amaru !'

'A stage name I take it to be, ma'am !'

'Yes ! a stage name.'

'What was his real name ?'

'I can't say,' replied Miss Whichello, in a hesitating voice. 'I knew him only as Amaru.'

'Humph ! here he called himself Jentham. Do you know anything about this murder, Miss Whichello, ma'am ?' and the inspector fixed a blood-shot grey eye on the thick veil.

'No ! no ! I know nothing about the murderer !' cried Miss Whichello in earnest tones. 'I heard that this man Jentham looked like a gipsy and was marked with a scar on the right cheek. From that description I thought that he might be Amaru, and I wish to see his body to be certain that I am right.'

'Well, Miss Whichello, ma'am,' said the stern Tinkler, after some deliberation, 'your request is out of the usual course of things ; but knowing you as a good and charitable lady, and thinking you may throw some light on this mysterious crime—why, I'll show you the "corpse with pleasure."

'One moment,' said the old lady, laying a detaining hand on the inspector's blue cloth sleeve. 'I must tell you that I can throw no light on the subject ; if I could I would. I simply desire to see the body of this man and to satisfy myself that he is Amaru.'

'Very good, Miss Whichello, ma'am ; you shall see it.'

'And you'll not mention that I came here, Mr Inspector.'

'I give you my word, ma'am—the word of a soldier. This way, Miss Whichello, this way.'

Following the rigid figure of the inspector, the little old lady was conducted by him to a small building of galvanised tin in the rear of the police-station. Several idlers were hanging about, amongst them being Miss Bell Mosk, who was trying to persuade a handsome young policeman to gratify her morbid curiosity.

Her eyes opened to their widest width when she recognised Miss Whichello's silk cloak and poke bonnet, and saw them vanish into the dead-house.

'Well I never!' said Miss Mosk. 'I never thought she'd be fond of corpses at her time of life, seeing as she'll soon be one herself.'

The little old lady and the inspector remained within for five or six minutes. When they came out the tears were falling fast beneath Miss Whichello's veil.

'Is that the man?' asked Tinkler, in a low voice.

'Yes!' replied Miss Whichello; 'that is the man I knew as Amaru.'

CHAPTER XVI

THE ZEAL OF INSPECTOR TINKLER

THE strange affair of Jentham's murder continued to occupy the attention of the Beaminster public throughout the week; and on the day when the inquest was held, popular excitement rose to fever heat. Inspector Tinkler, feeling that the County expected him to do great things worthy of his reputation as a zealous officer, worked his hardest to gather evidence likely to elucidate the mystery of the death; but in spite of the most strenuous exertions, his efforts resulted in total failure. The collected details proved to be of the most meagre description, and when the coroner sat on the body nothing transpired to reveal the name, or even indicate the identity of the assassin who had provided him with a body to sit on. It really seemed as though the Southberry murder would end in being relegated to the list of undiscovered crimes.

'For I can't work miracles,' exclaimed the indignant Tinkler, when reproached with this result, 'and somehow the case has got out of hand. The motive for the shooting can't be got at; the pistol used ain't to be picked up, search how you may; and as for the murdering villain who fired it, if he ain't down below where he ought to be, I'll take my oath as a soldier he ain't above ground. Take it how you will, this case is a corker and no mistake.'

It had certainly occurred to Tinkler's bothered mind that Miss Whichello should be called as a witness, if only to prove that at one time the dead man had occupied a better position in the world, but after a short interview with her he had abandoned this idea. Miss Whichello declared that she could throw no light on the affair, and that she had lost sight of the quondam violinist for over thirty years. Her recognition of him as Amaru had been entirely due to the description of his gipsy looks and the notice-

able cicatrice on his face; and she pointed out to Tinkler that she had not seen the so-called Jentham till after his death; moreover, it was unlikely that events which had occurred thirty years before could have resulted in the man's violent death at the present time; and Miss Whichello insisted that she knew nothing of the creature's later circumstances or acquaintances. Being thus ignorant, it was not to be expected that her evidence would be of any value, so at her earnest request Tinkler held his tongue, and forebore to summon her as a witness. Miss Whichello was greatly relieved in her own mind when the inspector came to this conclusion, but she did not let Tinkler see her relief.

From Mosk the officer had learned that the vagabond who called himself Jentham had appeared at The Derby Winner some three weeks previous to the time of his death. He had given no information as to where he had last rested, but, so far as Mosk knew, had dropped down from the sky. Certainly his conversation when he was intoxicated showed that he had travelled a great deal, and that his past was concerned with robbery, and bloodshed, and lawlessness; but the man had talked generally as any traveller might, had refrained from mentioning names, and altogether had spoken so loosely that nothing likely to lead to a tangible result could be gathered from his rambling discourses. He had paid his board and lodging for the first week, but thereafter had lived on credit, and at the time of his death had owed Mosk over two pounds, principally for strong drink. Usually he slept at The Derby Winner and loafed about the streets all day, but at times he went over to the gipsy camp near Southberry and fraternised with the Romany. This was the gist of Mosk's information, but he added, as an afterthought, that Jentham had promised to pay him when certain monies which he expected came into his possession.

'Who was going to pay him this money?' asked Tinkler, pricking up his ears.

'Carn't y'arsk me somethin' easier?' growled Mosk; 'how should I know? He said he was goin' to get the dibs, but who from, or where from, I dunno', for he held his tongue so far.'

'There was no money in the pockets of the clothes worn by the body,' said Tinkler, musingly.

'I dessay not, Mr Inspector. I don't believe the cove was expecting any money, I don't. 'Twas all moonshine — his talk, to make me trust him for bed and grub, and a blamed fool I've bin doin' so,' grumbled Mosk.

'The pockets were turned inside out, though.'

'Oh, they was, was they, Mr Inspector? Well, that does look queer. But if there

was any light-fingered business to be done, I dessay them gipsies hev somethin' to do with it.'

'Did the man go to the gipsy camp on Sunday night?'

'Bell ses he did,' replied Mr Mosk, 'but I went over to Southberry in the afternoon about a little 'oss as I'm sweet on, so I don't know what he did, save by 'earsay.'

Bell, on being questioned by the inspector, declared that Jentham had loitered about the hotel the greater part of Sunday, but had taken his departure about five o'clock. He did not say that he was going to the camp, but as he often paid a visit to it, she presumed that he had gone there during that evening. 'Especially as you found his corpse on the common, Mr Tinkler,' said Bell, 'no doubt the poor wretch was coming back from them gipsies.'

'Humph! it's not a bad idea,' said Tinkler, scratching his well-shaven chin. 'Strikes me as I'll go and look up Mother Jael.'

The result of an interview with that iniquitous old beldame proved that Jentham had certainly been the guest of the gipsies on Sunday evening, but had returned to Beaminster shortly after nine o'clock. He had stated that he was going back to The Derby Winner, and as it was his custom to come and go when he pleased, the Romany had not taken much notice of his departure. A vagrant like Jentham was quite independent of time.

'He was one of your lot, I suppose?' said Mr Inspector, taking a few notes in his pocket-book — a secretive little article which shut with a patent clasp.

'Yes, dearie, yes! Lord bless 'ee,' mumbled Mother Jael, blinking her cunning eyes, 'he was one of the gentle Romany sure enough.'

'Was he with you long, granny?'

'Three week, lovey, jus' three week. He cum to Beaminster and got weary like of you Gentiles, so he made hisself comforbal with us.'

'Blackguards to blackguards, and birds of a feather,' murmured Tinkler; then asked if Jentham had told Mother Jael anything about himself.

'He! screeched the old hag, 'he niver tol' me a word. He cum an' he go'd; but he kep his red rag to himself, he did. Duvel! he was a cunning one that Jentham.'

'Was his name Jentham, mother; or was it something else?'

'He called hisself so, dearie, but I niver known one of that gentle Romany as had a Gentle name. We sticks to our own mos'ly. Job! I shud think so.'

'Are you sure he was a gipsy?'

'Course I am, my noble Gorgio! He could patter the calo jib with the best of 'um. He know'd lots wot the Gentiles don' know, an' he had the eagle beak an' the peaked eye.'

Oh, tiny Jesus was a Romany chal, or may I die for it!'

'Do you know who killed him?' asked Tinkler, abruptly.

'No, lovey. 'Tweren't one of us, tho' you puts allays the wust on our backs. Job! dog do niver eat dog, as I knows, dearie.'

'He left your camp at nine o'clock?'

'Thereabouts, my lamb; jes' arter nine!'

'Was he sober or drunk?'

'Betwix' an' between, lovey; he cud walk straight an' talk straight, an' look arter his blessed life.'

'Humph! seems as though he couldn't,' said Mr Inspector, dryly.

'Duvel! that's a true sayin',' said Mother Jael, with a nod, 'but I don' know wot cum to him, dearie.'

At the inquest Mother Jael was called as a witness, and told the jury much the same story as she had related to Tinkler, with further details as to the movements of the gipsies on that night. She declared that none of the tribe had left the camp; that Jentham had gone away alone, comparatively sober; and that she did not hear of his murder until late the next day. In spite of examination and cross-examination, Mother Jael could give no evidence as to Jentham's real name, or about his past, or why he was lingering at Beaminster. 'He cum'd an' he go'd,' said Mother Jael, with the air of an oracle, and that was the extent of her information, delivered in a croaking, shuffling, unconvincing manner.

The carter, Giles Crake, who had found the body, was a stupid yokel whose knowledge was entirely limited to his immediate surroundings. Perched on his cart, he had seen the body lying in a ditch half full of water, on the other side of an earthen mound, which extended along the side of the main road. The spot where he discovered it was near Beaminster, and about five miles from the gipsy camp. The man had been shot through the heart; his pockets had been emptied and turned inside out; and evidently after the murder the robber had dragged the body over the mound into the ditch. Giles had not touched the corpse, being fearful of getting into trouble, but had come on at once to Beaminster to inform the police of his discovery.

It was Dr Graham who had examined the body when first discovered, and according to his evidence the man had been shot through the heart shortly before ten o'clock on Sunday night. The pistol had been fired so close that the clothing of the deceased over the heart was scorched and blackened with the powder of the cartridge. 'And from this fact,' added Graham, with one of his shrewd glances, 'I gather that the murderer must have been known to Jentham!'

'How is that, doctor?' asked one of the jury.

'Because he must have held him in talk

while contemplating the crime, sir. The murderer and his victim must almost have been breast to breast, and while the attention of the latter was distracted in some way, the assassin must have shot him at close quarters.'

'This is all theory, Dr Graham,' said the coroner, who was a rival practitioner.

'It seems to me that the whole case rests on theory,' retorted Graham, and shrugged his shoulders.

Before the evidence concerning the matter closed, Inspector Tinkler explained how difficult it had been to collect even the few details which the jury had heard. He stated also that although the strictest search had been made in the vicinity of the crime, the weapon with which it had been committed could not be found. As the shooting had been done during a downfall of rain, the assassin's and his victim's footmarks were visible in the soft clay of the roadway; also there were the marks of horse's hoofs, so it was probable that the murderer had been mounted. If this were so, neither gypsies nor harvesters could have killed the wretched man, as neither the one nor the other possessed horses and—'

'The gypsies have horses to draw their caravans!' interrupted a sharp-looking juryman.

'To draw their caravans I admit,' said the undaunted Tinkler, 'but not to ride on. Besides, I would remind you, Mr Jobson, as Mother Jael declares, that none of her crowd left the camp on that night.'

'Oh, she'd declare anything,' muttered Jobson, who had no great opinion of Tinkler's brains. 'Have the footmarks in the road been measured?'

'No, they haven't, Mr Jobson!'

'Then they should have, Mr Inspector; you can tell a lot from a footprint, as I've heard. It's what the French call the Bertillon system of identification, that's what it is.'

'I don't need to go to France to learn my business,' said Tinkler, tartly, 'and if I did get the measurements of them footmarks, how am I to know which is which—Jentham's or his murderer's? and how can I go round the whole of Beaminster to see whose feet fit 'em? I ask you that, Mr Jobson, sir.'

At this point, judging that the discussion had gone far enough, the coroner intervened and said that Mr Inspector had done his best to unravel a very difficult case. That he had not succeeded was the fault of the case and not of Mr Inspector, and for his part, he thought that the thanks of the Beaminster citizens were due to the efforts of so zealous and intelligent an officer as Tinkler. This sapient speech reduced the recalcitrant Jobson to silence, but he still held to his opinion that the over-confident Tinkler had bungled the matter, and in this view he was silently but heartily supported by shrewd Dr Graham, who privately considered that Mr Inspector Tinkler was little better than an ass. How-

ever, he did not give vent to this offensive opinion.

The summing-up of the coroner called for little remark. He was a worthy country doctor, with as much brains as would cover a sixpence, and the case was beyond him in every way. His remarks to the jury—equally stupid, with the exception of Jobson—were to the effect that it was evidently impossible to find out who had killed Jentham, that the man was a quarrelsome vagabond who probably had many enemies; that no doubt while crossing the common in a drunken humour he had met with someone as bad as himself, and had come to high words with him; and that the unknown man, being armed, had no doubt shot the deceased in a fit of rage. 'He robbed the body, I daresay, gentlemen,' concluded the coroner, 'and then threw it into the ditch to conceal the evidence of his crime. As we don't know the man, and are never likely to know him, I can only suggest that you should find a verdict in accordance with the evidence supplied to you by the zeal of Inspector Tinkler. Man has done all he can to find out this Cain, but his efforts have been vain, so we must leave the punishment of the murderer to God; and as Holy Scripture says that "murder will out," I have no doubt that some day the criminal will be brought to justice.'

After this wise speech it was not surprising that the jury brought in a verdict, 'That the deceased Jentham met with a violent death at the hands of some person or persons unknown,' that being the kind of verdict which juries without brains—as in the present instance—generally give. Having thus settled the matter to their own bovine satisfaction, the jury went away after having been thanked for their zeal by the coroner. That gentleman was great on zeal.

'Hum! Hum! Hum!' said Dr Graham to himself, 'there's too much zeal altogether. I wonder what M. de Talleyrand would have thought of these cabbages and their zeal. Well, Mr Inspector,' he added aloud, 'so you've finished off the matter nicely.'

'We have done our best, Dr Graham, sir.'

'And you don't know who killed the man?'

'No, sir, I don't; and what's more, I don't believe anybody ever will know.'

'Humph, that's your opinion, is it? Do you read much, Mr Inspector?'

'A novel at times, sir. I'm fond of a good novel.'

'Then let me recommend to your attention the works of a French author, by name Gaboriau. There's a man in them called Lecoq, who would have found out the truth, Mr Inspector.'

'Fiction, Dr Graham, sir! Fiction.'

'True enough, Mr Inspector, but most fiction is founded on fact.'

'Well, sir,' said Tinkler, with a superior

wise smile, 'I should like to see our case in the hands of your Mr Lecoq.'

'So should I, Mr Inspector, or in the hands of Sherlock Holmes. Bless me, Tinkler, they'd do almost as much as you have done. It is a pity that you are not a character in fiction, Tinkler.'

'Why, sir? Why, may I ask?'

'Because your author might have touched you up in weak parts, and have gifted you with some brains. Good-day, Mr Inspector.'

While Graham walked away chuckling at his banter of this red-tape official, the official himself stood gasping like a fish out of the water, and trying to realise the insult levelled at his dignity. Jobson—a small man—sidled round to the front of him and made a comment on the situation.

'It all comes of your not measuring them footmarks,' said Jobson. 'In detective novels the clever fellows always do that, but you'd never be put into a book, not you!'

'You'll be put into jail,' cried the outraged inspector.

'It's more than Jentham's murderer will if you've got the catching of him,' said Jobson, and walked off.

CHAPTER XVII

A CLERICAL DETECTIVE

ALL this time Mr Michael Cargrim had not been idle. On hearing of the murder, his thoughts had immediately centred themselves on the bishop. To say that the chaplain was shocked is to express his feelings much too mildly; he was horrified! thunderstruck! terrified! in fact, there was no word in the English tongue strong enough to explain his superlative state of mind. It was characteristic of the man's malignant nature that he was fully prepared to believe in Dr Pendle's guilt without hearing any evidence for or against this opinion. He was aware that Jentham had been cognisant of some weighty secret concerning the bishop's past, for the concealing of which he was to have been bribed, and when the report of the murder reached the chaplain's ears, he quite believed that in place of paying the sum agreed upon, Dr Pendle had settled accounts with the blackmailer by shooting him. Cargrim took this extreme view of the matter for two reasons; firstly, because he had gathered from the bishop's movements, and Jentham's talk of Tom Tiddler's ground, that a meeting on Southberry Heath had been arranged between the pair; secondly, because no money was found on the dead body, which would have been the case had the bribe been paid. To the circumstantial evidence that the turned-out pockets pointed to robbery, Mr Cargrim, at the moment, strangely enough, paid no attention.

In considering the case, Cargrim's wish was very much the father to the thought, for he desired to believe in the bishop's guilt, as the knowledge of it would give him a great deal of power over his ecclesiastical superior. If he could only collect sufficient evidence to convict Dr Pendle of murdering Jentham, and could show him the links in the chain of circumstances by which he arrived at such a conclusion, he had little doubt but that the bishop, to induce him to hide the crime, would become his abject slave. To gain such an immense power, and use it for the futherance of his own interests, Cargrim was quite prepared to compound a possible felony; so the last case of the bishop would be worse than the first. Instead of being in Jentham's power he would be in Cargrim's; and in place of taking the form of money, the blackmail would assume that of influence. So Mr Cargrim argued the case out; and so he determined to shape his plans: yet he had a certain hesitancy in taking the first step. He had, as he firmly believed, a knowledge that Dr Pendle was a murderer; yet although the possession of such a secret gave him unlimited power, he was afraid to use it, for its mere exercise in the present lack of material evidence to prove its truth was a ticklish job. Cargrim felt like a man gripping a comet by its tail, and doubtful whether to hold on or let go. However, this uncertain state of things could be remedied by a strict examination into the circumstances of the case; therefore Cargrim set his mind to searching them out. He had been present at the inquest, but none of the witnesses brought forward by the bungling Tinkler had made any statement likely to implicate the bishop. Evidently no suspicion connecting Dr Pendle with Jentham existed in the minds of police or public. Cargrim could have set such a rumour afloat by a mere hint that the dead man and the bishop's strange visitor on the night of the reception had been one and the same; but he did not think it judicious to do this. He wanted the bishop's secret to be his alone, and the more spotless was Dr Pendle's public character, the more anxious he would be to retain it by becoming Cargrim's slave in order that the chaplain might be silent regarding his guilt. But to obtain such an advantage it was necessary for Cargrim to acquaint himself with the way in which Dr Pendle had committed the crime. And this, as he was obliged to work by stealth, was no easy task.

After some cogitation the wily chaplain concluded that it would be best to hear the general opinion of the Beorminster gossips in order to pick up any stray scraps of information likely to be of use to him. Afterwards he intended to call on Mr Inspector Tinkler and hear officially the more immediate details of the case. By what he

heard from the police and the social Prattlers, Cargrim hoped to be guided in constructing his case against Dr Pendle. Then there was the bishop's London journey; the bishop's cheque-book with its missing butt; the bishop's journey to and from Southberry on the day and night when the murder had been committed; all these facts would go far to implicate him in the matter. Also Cargrim desired to find the missing pistol, and the papers which had evidently been taken from the corpse. This last idea was purely theoretical, as was Cargrim's fancy that Jenthani's power over Dr Pendle had to do with certain papers. He argued from the fact that the pockets of the dead man's clothes had been turned inside out. Cargrim did not believe that the bishop had paid the blackmail, therefore the pockets could not have been searched for the money; the more so, as no possible robber could have known that Jenthiam would be possessed of a sum worth committing murder for on that night. On the other hand, if Jenthiam had possessed papers which inculpated the bishop in any crime, it was probable that, after shooting him, the assassin had searched for, and had obtained, the papers to which he attached so much value. It was the bishop who had turned the pockets inside out, and, as Cargrim decided, for the above reason. Certainly, from a commonsense point of view, Cargrim's theory, knowing what he did know, was feasible enough.

Having thus arrived at a point where it was necessary to transmute thought into action, Mr Cargrim assumed his best clerical uniform, his tallest and whitest jam-pot collar, and drew on a pair of delicate lavender gloves. Spotless and neat and eminently sanctimonious, the chaplain took his demure way towards Mrs Pansey's residence, as he judged very rightly that she would be the most likely person to afford him possible information. The archdeacon's widow lived on the outskirts of Beorminster, in a gloomy old barrack of a mansion, surrounded by a large garden, which in its turn was girdled by a high red brick wall with broken glass bottles on the top, as though Mrs Pansey dwelt in a gaol, and was on no account to be allowed out. Had such a thing been possible, the whole of Beorminster humanity, rich and poor, would willingly have subscribed large sums to build the wall higher, and to add spikes to the glass bottles. Anything to keep Mrs Pansey in her gaol, and prevent her issuing forth as a social scourge.

Into the gaol Mr Cargrim was admitted with certain solemnity by a sour-faced footman whose milk of human kindness had turned acid in the thunderstorms of Mrs Pansey's spite. This engaging Cerberus conducted the chaplain into a large and sepulchral drawing-room in which the good lady and

Miss Norsham were partaking of afternoon tea. Mrs Pansey wore her customary skirts of solemn black, and looked more gloomy than ever; but Daisy, the elderly sylph, brightened the room with a dress of white muslin adorned with many little bows of white ribbon, so that—sartorially speaking—she was very young, and very virginal, and quite angelical in looks. Both ladies were pleased to see their visitor and received him warmly in their several ways; that is, Mrs Pansey groaned and Daisy giggled.

'Oh, how very nice of you to call, dear Mr Cargrim,' said the sylph. 'Mrs Pansey and I are positively dying to hear all about this very dreadful inquest. Tea?'

'Thank you; no sugar. Ah!' sighed Mr Cargrim, taking his cup, 'it is a terrible thing to think that an inquest should be held in Beorminster on the slaughtered body of a human being. Bread and butter! thank you!'

'It's a judgment,' declared Mrs Pansey, and devoured a buttery little square of toast with another groan louder than the first.

'Oh, do tell me who killed the poor thing, Mr Cargrim,' gushed Daisy, childishly.

'No one knows, Miss Norsham. The jury brought in a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown. You must excuse me if I speak too technically, but those are the precise words of the verdict.'

'And very silly words they are!' pronounced the hostess, *ex cathedra*; 'but what can you expect from a parcel of trading fools?'

'But, Mrs Pansey, no one knows who killed this man.'

'They should find out, Mr Cargrim.'

'They have tried to do so and have failed!'

'That shows that what I say is true. Police and jury are fools,' said Mrs Pansey, with the triumphant air of one clinching an argument.

'Oh, dear, it is so very strange!' said the fair Daisy. 'I wonder really what could have been the motive for the murder?'

'As the pockets were turned inside out,' said Mr Cargrim, 'it is believed that robbery was the motive.'

'Rubbish!' said Mrs Pansey, shaking her skirts; 'there is a deal more in this crime than meets the eye.'

'I believe general opinion is agreed upon that point,' said the chaplain, dryly.

'What is Miss Whichello's opinion?' demanded the archdeacon's widow. Cargrim could not suppress a start. It was strange that Mrs Pansey should allude to Miss Whichello, when he also had his suspicions regarding her knowledge of the dead man.

'I don't see what she has to do with it,' he said quietly, with the intention of arriving at Mrs Pansey's meaning.

'Ah! no more can anyone else, Mr Cargrim. But I know! I know!'

'Know what? dear Mrs Pansey. Oh, really! you are not going to say that poor Miss Whichello fired that horrid pistol.'

'I don't say anything, Daisy, as I don't want to figure in a libel action; but I should like to know why Miss Whichello went to the dead-house to see the body.'

'Did she go there? are you sure?' exclaimed the chaplain, much surprised.

'I can believe my own eyes, can't I?' snapped Mrs Pansey. 'I saw her myself, for I was down near the police-station the other evening on one of my visits to the poor. There, while returning home by the dead-house, I saw that hussy of a Bell Mosk making eyes at a policeman, and I recognised Miss Whichello for all her veil.'

'Did she wear a veil?'

'I should think so; and a very thick one. But if she wants to do underhand things she should change her bonnet and cloak. I knew them! don't tell me!'

Certainly, Miss Whichello's actions seemed suspicious; and, anxious to learn their meaning from the lady herself, Cargrim mentally determined to visit the Jenny Wren house after leaving Mrs Pansey, instead of calling on Miss Tancred, as he had intended. However, he was in no hurry; and, asking Daisy for a second cup of tea to prolong his stay, went on drawing out his hostess.

'How very strange!' said he, in allusion to Miss Whichello. 'I wonder why she went to view so terrible a sight as that man's body.'

'Ah!' replied Mrs Pansey, with a shake of her turban, 'we all want to know that. But I'll find her out; that I will.'

'But, dear Mrs Pansey, you don't think sweet Miss Whichello has anything to do with this very dreadful murder?'

'I accuse no one, Daisy. I simply think!'

'What do you think?' questioned Cargrim, rather sharply.

'I think—what I think,' was Mrs Pansey's enigmatic response; and she shut her mouth hard. Honestly speaking, the artful old lady was as puzzled by Miss Whichello's visit to the dead-house as her hearers, and she could bring no very tangible accusation against her, but Mrs Pansey well knew the art of spreading scandal, and was quite satisfied that her significant silence—about nothing—would end in creating something against Miss Whichello. When she saw Cargrim look at Daisy, and Daisy look back to Cargrim, and remembered that their tongues were only a degree less venomous than her own, she was quite satisfied that a seed had been sown likely to produce a very fertile crop of baseless talk. The prospect cheered her greatly, for Mrs Pansey hated Miss Whichello as much as a certain personage she quoted on occasions is said to hate holy water.

'You are quite an Ear of Dionysius,' said the chaplain, with a complimentary smirk; 'everything seems to come to you.'

'I make it my business to know what is going on, Mr Cargrim,' replied the lady, much gratified, 'in order to stem the torrent of infidelity, debauchery, lying and flattery which rolls through this city.'

'Oh, dear me! how strange it is that the dear bishop saw nothing of this frightful murder,' exclaimed Daisy, who had been reflecting. 'He rode back from Southberry late on Sunday night, I hear.'

'His lordship saw nothing, I am sure,' said Cargrim, hastily, for it was not his design to incriminate Dr Pendle; 'if he had, he would have mentioned it to me. And you know, Miss Norsham, there was quite a tempest on that night, so even if his lordship had passed near the scene of the murder, he could not have heard the shot of the assassin or the cry of the victim. The rain and thunder would in all human probability have drowned both.'

'Besides which his lordship is neither sharp-eared nor observant,' said Mrs Pansey, spitefully; 'a man less fitted to be a bishop doesn't live.'

'Oh, dear Mrs Pansey' you are too hard on him.'

'Rubbish! don't tell me! What about his sons, Mr Cargrim? Did they hear anything?'

'I don't quite follow you, Mrs Pansey.'

'Bless the man, I'm talking English, I hope. Both George and Gabriel Pendle were on Southberry Heath on Sunday night.'

'Are you sure?' cried the chaplain, doubtful if he heard aright.

'Of course I am sure,' snorted the lady. 'Would I speak so positively if I wasn't? No, indeed. I got the news from my page-boy.'

'Really! from that sweet little Cyril!'

'Yes, from that worthless scamp Cyril! Cyril,' repeated Mrs Pansey, with a snort, 'the idea of a pauper like Mrs Jennings giving her brat such a fine name. Well, it was Cyril's night out on Sunday, and he did not come home till late, and then made his appearance very wet and dirty. He told me that he had been on Southberry Heath and had been almost knocked into a ditch by Mr Pendle galloping past. I asked him which Mr Pendle had been out riding on Sunday, and he declared that he had seen them both—George about eight o'clock when he was on the Heath, and Gabriel shortly after nine, as he was coming home. I gave the wretched boy a good scolding, no supper, and a psalm to commit to memory!'

'George and Gabriel Pendle riding on Southberry Heath on that night,' said the chaplain, thoughtfully; 'it is very strange.'

'Strange!' almost shouted Mrs Pansey, 'it's worse than strange—it's Sabbath-breaking—

and their father riding also. No wonder the mystery of iniquity doth work, when those high in the land break the fourth commandment ; are you going, Mr Cargrim ?'

' Yes ! I am sorry to leave such charming company, but I have an engagement. Good-bye, Miss Norsham ; your tea was worthy of the fair hands which made it. Good-bye, Mrs Pansey. Let us hope that the authorities will discover and punish this unknown Cain.'

' Cain or Jezebel,' said Mrs Pansey, darkly, ' it's one or the other of them.'

Whether the good lady meant to indicate Miss Whichello by the second name, Mr Cargrim did not stay to inquire, as he was in a hurry to see her himself and find out why she had visited the dead-house. He therefore bowed and smiled himself out of Mrs Pansey's gaol, and walked as rapidly as he was able to the little house in the shadow of the cathedral towers. Here he found Miss Whichello all alone, as Mab had gone out to tea with some friends. The little lady welcomed him warmly, quite ignorant of what a viper she was inviting to warm itself on her hearth, and visitor and hostess were soon chattering amicably on the most friendly of terms.

Gradually Cargrim brought round the conversation to Mrs Pansey and mentioned that he had been paying her a visit.

' I hope you enjoyed yourself, I'm sure, Mr Cargrim,' said Miss Whichello, good-humouredly, ' but it gives me no pleasure to visit Mrs Pansey.'

' Well, do you know, Miss Whichello, I find her rather amusing. She is a very observant lady, and converses wittily about what she observes.'

' She talks scandal, if that is what you mean.'

' I am afraid that word is rather harsh, Miss Whichello.'

' It may be, sir, but it is rather appropriate —to Mrs Pansey ! Well ! and who was she talking about to-day ?'

' About several people, my dear lady ; yourself amongst the number.'

' Indeed ! ' Miss Whichello drew her little body up stiffly. ' And had she anything unpleasant to say about me ?'

' Oh, not at all. She only remarked that she saw you visiting the dead-house last week.'

Miss Whichello let fall her cup with a crash, and turned pale. ' How does she know that ? ' was her sharp question.

' She saw you,' repeated the chaplain ; and in spite of your veil she recognised you by your cloak and bonnet.'

' I am greatly obliged to Mrs Pansey for the interest she takes in my business,' said Miss Whichello, in her most stately manner. ' I did visit the Beominster dead-house. There !'

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CHAPLAIN ON THE WARPATH

MISS WHICHELLO's frank admission that she had visited the dead-house rather disconcerted Mr Cargrim. From the circumstance of the veil, he had presumed that she wished her errand there to be unknown, in which case her conduct would have appeared highly suspicious, since she was supposed to know nothing about Jenthiam or Jenthiam's murder. But her ready acknowledgment of the fact apparently showed that she had nothing to conceal. Cargrim, for all his acuteness, did not guess that of two evils Miss Whichello had chosen the least. In truth, she did not wish her visit to the dead-house to be known, but as Mrs Pansey was cognisant of it, she judged it wiser to neutralise any possible harm that that lady could do by admitting the original statement to be a true one. This honesty would take the wind out of Mrs Pansey's sails, and prevent her from distorting an admitted fact into a fiction of hinted wickedness. Furthermore, Miss Whichello was prepared to give Cargrim a sufficient reason for her visit, so that he might not invent one. Only by so open a course could she keep the secret of her thirty-year-old acquaintance with the dead man. As a rule, the little old lady hated subterfuge, but in this case her only chance of safety lay in beating Pansey, Cargrim and Company with their own weapons. And who can say that she was acting wrongly ?

' Yes, Mr Cargrim,' she repeated, looking him directly in the face, ' Mrs Pansey is right, I was at the dead-house and I went to see the corpse of the man Jenthiam. I suppose you—and Mrs Pansey—wonder why I did so ? '

' Oh, my dear lady ! ' remonstrated the embarrassed chaplain, ' by no means ; such knowledge is none of our business—that is, none of *my* business.'

' You have made it your business, however ! ' observed Miss Whichello, dryly, ' else you would scarcely have informed me of Mrs Pansey's unwarrantable remarks on my private affairs. Well, Mr Cargrim, I suppose you know that this tramp attacked my niece on the high road.'

' Yes, Miss Whichello, I know that.'

' Very good ; as I considered that the man was a dangerous character I thought that he should be compelled to leave Beominster ; so I went to The Derby Winner on the night that you met me, in order to—'

' To see Mrs Mosk ! ' interrupted Cargrim, softly, hoping to entrap her.

' In order to see Mrs Mosk, and in order to see Jenthiam. I intended to tell him that if he did not leave Beominster at once that I should inform the police of his attack on Miss Arden. Also, as I was willing to give him a chance of reforming his conduct, I intended to

supply him with a small sum for his immediate departure. On that night, however, I did not see him, as he had gone over to the gipsy camp. When I heard that he was dead I could scarcely believe it, so, to set my mind at rest, and to satisfy myself that Mab would be in no further danger from his insolence when she walked abroad, I visited the dead-house and saw his body. That, Mr Cargrim, was the sole reason for my visit; and as it concerned myself alone, I wore a veil so as not to provoke remark. It seems that I was wrong, since Mrs Pansey has been discussing me. However, I hope you will set her mind at rest by telling her what I have told you.'

'Really, my dear Miss Whichello, you are very severe; I assure you all this explanation is needless.'

'Not while Mrs Pansey has so venomous a tongue, Mr Cargrim. She is quite capable of twisting my innocent desire to assure myself that Mab was safe from this man into some extraordinary statement without a word of truth in it. I shouldn't be surprised if Mrs Pansey had hinted to you that I had killed this creature.'

As this was precisely what the archdeacon's widow had done, Cargrim felt horribly uncomfortable under the scorn of Miss Whichello's justifiable indignation. He grew red, and smiled feebly, and murmured weak apologies; all of which Miss Whichello saw and heard with supreme contempt. Mr Cargrim, by his late tittle-tattling conversation, had fallen in her good opinion; and she was not going to let him off without a sharp rebuke for his unfounded chatter. Cutting short his murmurs, she proceeded to nip in the bud any further reports he or Mrs Pansey might spread in connection with the murder, by explaining much more than was needful.

'And if Mrs Pansey should hear that Captain Pendle was on Southberry Heath on Sunday night,' she continued, 'I trust that she will not accuse him of shooting the man, although as I know, and you know also, Mr Cargrim, she is quite capable of doing so.'

'Was Captain Pendle on Southberry Heath?' asked Cargrim, who was already acquainted with this fact, although he did not think it necessary to tell Miss Whichello so. 'You can't say so?'

'Yes, he was! He rode over to the gipsy camp to purchase an engagement ring for Miss Arden from Mother Jael. That ring is now on her finger.'

'So Miss Arden is engaged to Captain Pendle,' cried Cargrim, in a gushing manner. 'I congratulate you, and her, and him.'

'Thank you, Mr Cargrim,' said Miss Whichello, stiffly.

'I suppose Captain Pendle saw nothing of Jentham at the gipsy camp?'

'No! he never saw the man at all that evening.'

'Did he hear the shot fired?'

'Of course he did not!' cried Miss Whichello, wrathfully. 'How could he hear with the noise of the storm? You might as well ask if the bishop did; he was on Southberry Heath on that night.'

'Oh, yes, but he heard nothing, dear lady; he told me so.'

'You seem to be very interested in this murder, Mr Cargrim,' said the little lady, with a keen look.

'Naturally, everyone in Beorminster is interested in it. I hope the criminal will be captured.'

'I hope so too; do you know who he is?'

'I? my dear lady, how should I know?'

'I thought Mrs Pansey might have told you!' said Miss Whichello, coolly. 'She knows all that goes on, and a good deal that doesn't. But you can tell her that both I and Captain Pendle are innocent, although I did visit the dead-house, and although he *was* on Southberry Heath when the crime was committed.'

'You are very severe, dear lady!' said Cargrim, rising to take his leave, for he was anxious to extricate himself from his very uncomfortable and undignified position.

'Solomon was even more severe, Mr Cargrim. He said, "Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross." I fancy there were Mrs Panseys in those days, Mr Cargrim.'

In the face of this choice proverb Mr Cargrim beat a hasty retreat. Altogether Miss Whichello was too much for him; and for once in his life he was at a loss how to gloss over his defeat. Not until he was in Tinkler's office did he recover his feeling of superiority. With a man—especially with a social inferior—he felt that he could deal; but who can contend with a woman's tongue? It is her sword and shield; her mouth is her bow; her words are the arrows; and the man who hopes to withstand such an armoury of deadly weapons is a superfine idiot. Cargrim, not being one, had run away; but in his rage at being compelled to take flight, he almost exceeded Mrs Pansey in hating the cause of it. Miss Whichello had certainly gained a victory, but she had also made an enemy.

'So the inquest is over, Mr Inspector,' said the ruffled Cargrim, smoothing his plumes.

'Over and done with, sir; and the corpse is now six feet under earth.'

'A sad end, Mr Inspector, and a sad life. To be a wanderer on the face of the earth; to be violently removed when sinning; to be buried at the expense of an alien parish; what a fate for a baptised Christian.'

'Don't you take on so, Mr Cargrim, sir!' said Tinkler, grimly. 'There was precious little religion about Jentham, and he was buried in a much better fashion than he deserved, and not by the parish either.'

Cargrim looked up suddenly. 'Who paid for his funeral then?'

'A charitable la—person, sir, whose name I am not at liberty to tell anyone, at her own request.'

'At her own request,' said the chaplain, noting Tinkler's slips and putting two and two together with wondrous rapidity; 'Ah, Miss Whichello is indeed a good lady.'

'Did you—do you know—are you aware that Miss Whichello buried him, sir?' stammered the inspector, considerably astonished.

'I have just come from her house,' replied Cargrim, answering the question in the affirmative by implication.

'Well, she asked me not to tell anyone, sir; but as she told you, I suppose I can say as she buried that corpse with a good deal of expense.'

'It is not to be wondered at, seeing that she took an interest in the wretched creature,' said Cargrim, delicately feeling his way. 'I trust that the sight of his body in the dead-house didn't shock her nerves.'

'Did she tell you she visited the dead-house?' asked Tinkler, his eyes growing larger at the extent of the chaplain's information.

'Of course she did,' replied Cargrim, and this was truer than most of his remarks.

Tinkler brought down a heavy fist with a bang on his desk. 'Then I'm blest, Mr Cargrim, sir, if I can understand what she meant by asking me to hold my tongue.'

'Ah, Mr Inspector, the good lady is one of those rare spirits who "do good by stealth and blush to find it tame,"'

'Seems a kind of silly to go on like that, sir!'

'We are not all rare spirits, Tinkler.'

'I don't know what the world would be if we were, Mr Cargrim, sir. But Miss Whichello seemed so anxious that I should hold my tongue about the visit and the burial that I can't make out why she talked about them to you or to anybody.'

'I cannot myself fathom her reason for such unnecessary secrecy, Mr Inspector; unless it is that she wishes the murderer to be discovered.'

'Well, she can't spot him,' said Tinkler, emphatically, 'for all she knows about Jentham is thirty years old.'

Cargrim could scarcely suppress a start at this unexpected information. So Miss Whichello did know something about the dead man after all; and doubtless her connection with Jentham had to do with the secret of the bishop. Cargrim felt that he was on the eve of an important discovery; for Tinkler, thinking that Miss Whichello had made a confidant of the chaplain, babbled on innocently, without guessing that his attentive listener was making a base use of him. The shrug of the shoulders with which Cargrim commented on his last remark made Tinkler talk further.

'Besides!' said he, expansively, 'what does Miss Whichello know? Only that the man

was a violinist thirty years ago, and that he called himself Amaru. Those details don't throw any light on the murder, Mr Cargrim, sir.'

The chaplain mentally noted the former name and former profession of Jentham and shook his head. 'Such information is utterly useless,' he said gravely, 'and the people with whom Amaru *alias* Jentham associated then are doubtless all dead by this time.'

'Well, Miss Whichello didn't mention any of his friends, sir, but I daresay it wouldn't be much use if she did. Beyond the man's former name and business as a fiddler she told me nothing. I suppose, sir, she didn't tell you anything likely to help us?'

'No! I don't think the past can help the present, Mr Tinkler. But what is your candid opinion about this case?'

'I think it is a mystery, Mr Cargrim, sir, and is likely to remain one.'

'You don't anticipate that the murderer will be found?'

'No!' replied Mr Inspector, gruffly. 'I don't.'

'Cannot Mosk, with whom Jentham was lodging, enlighten you?'

Tinkler shook his head. 'Mosk said that Jentham owed him money, and promised to pay him this week; but that I believe was all moonshine.'

'But Jentham might have expected to receive money, Mr Inspector?'

'Not he, Mr Cargrim, sir. He knew no one here who would lend or give him a farthing. He had no money on him when his corpse was found.'

'Yet the body had been robbed!'

'Oh, yes, the body was robbed sure enough, for we found the pockets turned inside out. But the murderer only took the rubbish a vagabond was likely to have on him.'

'Were any papers taken, do you think, Mr Inspector?'

'Papers!' echoed Tinkler, scratching his head. 'What papers?'

'Well!' said Cargrim, shirking a true explanation, 'papers likely to reveal his real name and the reason of his haunting Beorminster.'

'I don't think there could have been any papers, Mr Cargrim, sir. If there had been, we'd ha' found 'em. The murderer wouldn't have taken rubbish like that.'

'But why was the man killed?' persisted the chaplain.

'He was killed in a row,' said Tinkler, decisively, 'that's my theory. Mother Jael says that he was half seas over when he left the camp, so I daresay he met some labourer who quarrelled with him and used his pistol.'

'But is it likely that a labourer would have a pistol?'

'Why not? Those harvesters don't trust one another, and it's just as likely as not that

one of them would keep a pistol to protect his property from the other.'

'Was search made for the pistol?'

'Yes, it was, and no pistol was found. I tell you what, Mr Cargrim,' said Tinkler, rising in rigid military fashion, 'it's my opinion that there is too much talk about this case. Jentharn was shot in a drunken row, and the murderer has cleared out of the district. That is the whole explanation of the matter.'

'I daresay you are right, Mr Inspector,' sighed Cargrim, putting on his hat. 'We are all apt to elevate the commonplace into the romantic.'

'Or make a mountain out of a mole-hill, which is plain English,' said Tinkler. 'Good-day, Mr Cargrim.'

'Good-day, Tinkler, and many thanks for your lucid statement of the case. I have no doubt that his lordship, the bishop, will take your very sensible view of the matter.'

As it was now late, Mr Cargrim returned to the palace, not ill pleased with his afternoon's work. He had learned that Miss Whichello had visited the dead-house, that she had known the dead man as a violinist under the name of Amaru, and had buried him for old acquaintance sake at her own expense. Also he had been informed that Captain Pendle and his brother Gabriel had been on Southberry Heath on the very night, and about the very time, when the man had been shot; so, with all these materials, Mr Cargrim hoped sooner or later to build up a very pretty case against the bishop. If Miss Whichello was mixed up with the matter, so much the better. At this moment Mr Cargrim's meditation was broken in upon by the voice of Dr Graham.

'You are the very man I want, Cargrim. The bishop has written asking me to call to-night and see him. Just tell him that I am engaged this evening, but that I will attend on him to-morrow morning at ten o'clock.'

'Oh! ho!' soliloquised Cargrim, when the doctor, evidently in a great hurry, went off, 'so his lordship wants to see Dr Graham. I wonder what that is for?'

CHAPTER XIX

THE BISHOP'S REQUEST

WHATEVER Dr Pendle may have thought of the Southberry murder, he kept his opinion very much to himself. It is true that he expressed himself horrified at the occurrence of so barbarous a crime in his diocese, that he spoke pityingly of the wretched victim, that he was interested in hearing the result of the inquest, but in each case he was guarded in his remarks. At first, on hearing of the crime, his face had betrayed

—at all events, to Cargrim's jealous scrutiny—an expression of relief, but shortly afterwards—on second thoughts, as one might say—there came into his eyes a look of apprehension. That look which seemed to expect the drawing near of evil days never left them again, and daily his face grew thinner and whiter, his manner more restless and ill at ease. He seemed as uncomfortable as was Damocles under the hair-suspended sword.

Other people besides the chaplain noticed the change, but, unlike Cargrim, they did not ascribe it to a consciousness of guilt, but to ill-health. Mrs Pendle, who was extremely fond of her husband, and was well informed with regard to the newest treatment and the latest fashionable medicine, insisted that the bishop suffered from nerves brought on by overwork, and plaintively suggested that he should take the cure for them at some German Bad. But the bishop, sturdy old Briton that he was, insisted that so long as he could keep on his feet there was no necessity for his women-folk to make a fuss over him, and declared that it was merely the change in the weather which caused him—as he phrased it—to feel a trifle out of sorts.

'It is hot one day and cold the next, my dear,' he said in answer to his wife's remonstrances, 'as if the clerk of the weather didn't know his own mind. How can you expect the liver of a fat, lazy old man like me not to respond to these sudden changes of temperature?'

'Fat, bishop!' cried Mrs Pendle, in vexed tones. 'You are not fat; you have a fine figure for a man of your age. And as to lazy, there is no one in the Church who works harder than you do. No one can deny that.'

'You flatter me, my love!'

'You under-rate yourself, my dear. But if it is liver, why not try Woodhall Spa? I believe the treatment there is very drastic and beneficial. Why not go there, bishop? I'm sure a holiday would do you no harm.'

'I haven't time for a holiday, Amy. My liver must get well as best it can while I go about my daily duties—that is if it is my liver.'

'I don't believe it is,' remarked Mrs Pendle; 'it is nerves, my dear, nothing else. You hardly eat anything, you start at your own shadow, and at times you are too irritable for words. Go to Droitwich for those unruly nerves of yours, and try brine baths.'

'I rather think you should go to Nauheim for that weak heart of yours, my love,' replied Dr Pendle, arranging his wife's pillows; 'in fact, I want you and Lucy to go there next month.'

'Indeed, bishop, I shall do no such thing! You are not fit to look after yourself.'

'Then Graham shall look after me.'

'Dr Graham!' echoed Mrs Pendle, with contempt. 'He is old-fashioned, and quite ignorant of the new medicines. No, bishop, you must go to Droitwich.'

'And you, my dear, to Nauheim!'

At this point matters came to an issue between them, for Mrs Pendle, who like most people possessed a fund of what may be called nervous obstinacy, positively refused to leave England. On his side, the bishop insisted more eagerly than was his custom that Mrs Pendle should undergo the Schott treatment at Nauheim. For some time the argument was maintained with equal determination on both sides, until Mrs Pendle concluded it by bursting into tears and protesting that her husband did not understand her in the least. Whereupon, as the only way to soothe her, the bishop admitted that he was in the wrong and apologised.

All the same, he was determined that his wife should go abroad, and thinking she might yield to professional persuasions, he sent for Dr Graham. By Cargrim a message was brought that the doctor would be with the bishop next morning, so Pendle, not to provoke further argument, said nothing more on the subject to his wife. But here Lucy came on the scene, and seemed equally as averse as her mother to Continental travel. She immediately entered her protest against the proposed journey.

'Mamma is better now than ever she was,' said Lucy, 'and if she goes to Nauheim the treatment will only weaken her.'

'It will strengthen her in the long run, Lucy. I hear wonderful accounts of the Nauheim cures.'

'Oh, papa, every Bad says that it cures more patients than any other, just as every Bad advertises that its waters have so much per cent, more salt or sodium or iodine, or whatever they call it, than the rest. Besides, if you really think mamma should try this cure she can have it at Bath or in London. They say it is just as good in either place as at Nauheim.'

'I think not, Lucy; and I wish you and your mother to go abroad for a month or two. My mind is made up on the subject.'

'Why, papa,' cried Lucy, playfully, 'one would think you wanted to get rid of us.'

The bishop winced and turned a shade paler. 'You are talking at random, my dear,' he said gravely; 'if it were not for your mother's good I should not deprive myself of your society.'

'Poor mother!' sighed Lucy, and 'poor Harry,' she added as an afterthought.

'There need be no "poor Harry" about the matter,' said Dr Pendle, rather sharply. 'If that is what is troubling you, I daresay Harry will be glad to escort you and your mother over to Germany.'

Lucy became a rosy red with pleasure.

'Do you really think Harry will like to come?' she asked in a fluttering voice.

'He is no true lover if he doesn't,' replied her father, with a wan smile. 'Now, run away, my love, I am busy. To-morrow we shall settle the question of your going.'

When to-morrow came, Cargrim, all on fire with curiosity, tried his hardest to stay in the library when Dr Graham came; but as the bishop wished his interview to be private, he intimated the fact pretty plainly to his obsequious chaplain. In fact, he spoke so sharply that Cargrim felt distinctly aggrieved; and but for the trained control he kept of his temper, might have said something to show Dr Pendle the suspicions he entertained. However, the time was not yet ripe for him to place all his cards on the table, for he had not yet conceived a plausible case against the bishop. He was on the point of pronouncing the name 'Amaru' to see if it would startle Dr Pendle, but remembering his former failures when he had introduced the name of 'Jentham' to the bishop's notice, he was wise enough to hold his tongue. It would not do to arouse Dr Pendle's suspicions until he could accuse him plainly of murdering the man, and could produce evidence to substantiate his accusation. The evidence Cargrim wished to obtain was that of the cheque butt and the pistol, but as yet he did not see his way how to become possessed of either. Pending doing so, he hid himself in the grass like the snake he was, ready to strike his unsuspecting benefactor when he could do so with safety and effect.

In accordance with his resolution on this point, Mr Cargrim was meek and truckling while he was with the bishop, and when Dr Graham was announced he sidled out of the library with a bland smile. Dr Graham gave him a curt nod in response to his gracious greeting, and closed the door himself before he advanced to meet the bishop. Nay, more, so violent was his dislike to good Mr Cargrim, that he made a few remarks about that apostle before coming to the object of his visit.

'If you were a student of Lavater, bishop,' said he, rubbing his hands, 'you would not tolerate that Jesuitical Rodin near you for one moment.'

'Jesuitical Rodin, doctor! I do not understand.'

'Ah, that comes of not reading French novels, my lord!'

'I do not approve of the moral tone of French fiction,' said the bishop, stiffly.

'Few of our English Pharisees do,' replied Graham, dryly; 'not that I rank you among the hypocrites, bishop, so do not take my remark in too literal a sense.'

'I am not so thin-skinned or self-conscious as to do so, Graham. But your meaning of a Jesuitical Rodin?'

'It is explained in *The Wandering Jew* of Eugene Sue, bishop. You should read that novel if only to arrive by analogy at the true character of your chaplain. Rodin is one of the personages in the book, and Rodin,' said the doctor decisively, 'is Cargrim!'

'You are severe, doctor. Michael is an estimable young man.'

'Michael and the Dragon!' said Graham, playing upon the name. 'Humph! he is more like the latter than the former. Mr Michael Cargrim is the young serpent as Satan is the old one.'

'I always understood that you considered Satan a myth, doctor!'

'So I do; so he is; a bogey of the Middle and Classical Ages constructed out of Pluto and Pan. But he serves excellently well for an illustration of your pet parson.'

'Cargrim is not a pet of mine,' rejoined the bishop, coldly, 'and I do not say that he is a perfect character. Still, he is not bad enough to be compared to Satan. You speak too hurriedly, doctor, and, if you will pardon my saying so, too irreligiously.'

'I beg your pardon, I forgot that I was addressing a bishop. But as to that young man, he is a bad and dangerous character.'

'Doctor, doctor,' protested the bishop, raising a deprecating hand.

'Yes, he is,' insisted Graham; 'his goodness and meekness are all on the surface! I am convinced that he is a kind of human mole who works underground, and makes mischief in secret ways. If you have a cupboard with a skeleton, bishop, take care Mr Cargrim doesn't steal the key.'

Graham spoke with some meaning, for since the illness of Dr Pendle after Jenthim's visit, he had suspected that the bishop was worried in his mind, and that he possessed a secret which was wearing him out. Had he known that the strange visitor was one and the same with the murdered man, he might have spoken still more to the point; but the doctor was ignorant of this and consequently conceived the bishop's secret to be much more harmless than it really was. However, his words touched his host nearly, for Dr Pendle started and grew nervous, and looked so haggard and worried that Graham continued his speech without giving him time to make a remark.

'However, I did not come here to discuss Cargrim,' he said cheerfully, 'but because you sent for me. It is about time,' said Graham, grimly, surveying the bishop's wasted face and embarrassed manner. 'You are looking about as ill as a man can look. What is the matter with you?'

'Nothing is the matter with me. I am in my usual health.'

'You look it,' said the doctor, ironically. 'Good Lord, man!' with sudden wrath, 'why in the name of the Thirty-Nine Articles can't you tell me the truth!'

'The truth?' echoed the bishop, faintly.

'Yes, my lord, I said the truth, and I mean the truth. If you are not wrong in body you are in mind. A man doesn't lose flesh, and colour, and appetite, and self-control for nothing. You want me to cure you. Well, I can't, unless you show me the root of your trouble.'

'I am worried over a private affair,' confessed Pendle, driven into a corner.

'Something wrong?' asked Graham, raising his eyebrows.

'Yes, something is very wrong.'

'Can't it be put right?'

'I fear not,' said the bishop, in hopeless tones. 'It is one of those things beyond the power of mortal man to put right.'

'Your trouble must be serious,' said Graham, with a grave face.

'It is very serious. You can't help me. I can't help myself. I must endure my sorrow as best I may. After all, God strengthens the back for the burden.'

'Oh, Lord!' groaned Graham to himself, 'that make-the-best-of-it-view seems to be the gist of Christianity. What the deuce is the good of laying a too weighty burden on any back, when you've got to strengthen it to bear it? Well, bishop,' he added aloud, 'I have no right to ask for a glimpse of your skeleton. But can I help you in any way?'

'Yes,' cried the bishop, eagerly. 'I sent for you to request your aid. You can help me, Graham, and very materially.'

'I'm willing to do so. What shall I do?'

'Send my wife and daughter over to Nauheim on the pretext that Mrs Pendle requires the baths, and keep them there for two months.'

Dr Graham looked puzzled, for he could by no means conceive the meaning of so odd a request. In common with other people, he was accustomed to consider Bishop and Mrs Pendle a model couple, who would be as miserable as two separated love-birds if parted. Yet here was the husband asking his aid to send away the wife on what he admitted was a transparent pretext. For the moment he was nonplussed.

'Pardon me, bishop,' he said delicately, 'but have you had words with your wife?'

'No! no! God forbid, Graham. She is as good and tender as she always is: as dear to me as she ever was. But I wish her to go away for a time, and I desire Lucy to accompany her. Yesterday I suggested that they should take a trip to Nauheim, but both of them seemed unwilling to go. Yet they must go!' cried the bishop, vehemently; 'and you must help me in my trouble by insisting upon their immediate departure.'

Graham was more perplexed than ever. 'Has your secret trouble anything to do with Mrs Pendle?' he demanded, hardly knowing what to say.

'It has everything to do with her!'

'Does she know that it has?'

'No, she knows nothing—not even that I am keeping a secret from her; doctor,' said Pendle, rising, 'if I could tell you my trouble I would, but I cannot; I dare not! If you help me, you must do so with implicit confidence in me, knowing that I am acting for the best.'

'Well, bishop, you place me rather in a cleft stick,' said the doctor, looking at the agitated face of the man with his shrewd little eyes. 'I don't like acting in the dark. One should always look before he leaps, you know.'

'But, good heavens, man! I am not asking you to do anything wrong. My request is a perfectly reasonable one. I want my wife and daughter to leave England for a time, and you can induce them to take the journey.'

'Well,' said Graham, calmly, 'I shall do so.'

'Thank you, Graham. It is good of you to accede to my request.'

'I wouldn't do it for everyone,' said Graham, sharply. 'And although I do not like being shut out from your confidence, I know you well enough to trust you thoroughly. A couple of months at Nauheim may do your wife good, and—as you tell me—will relieve your mind.'

'It will certainly relieve my mind,' said the bishop, very emphatically.

'Very good, my lord. I'll do my very best to persuade Mrs Pendle and your daughter to undertake the journey.'

'Of course,' said Pendle, anxiously, 'you won't tell them all I have told you! I do not wish to explain myself too minutely to them.'

'I am not quite so indiscreet as you think, my lord,' replied Graham, with some dryness. 'Your wife shall leave Beorminster for Nauheim thinking that your desire for her departure is entirely on account of her health.'

'Thank you again, doctor!' and the bishop held out his hand.

'Come,' said Graham to himself as he took it, 'this secret can't be anything very dreadful if he gives me his hand. My lord!' he added aloud, 'I shall see Mrs Pendle at once. But before closing this conversation I would give you a warning.'

'A warning!' stammered the bishop, starting back.

'A very necessary warning,' said the doctor, solemnly. 'If you have a secret, beware of Cargrim.'

CHAPTER XX

MOTHER JAEL

DOCTOR GRAHAM was not the man to fail in carrying through successfully any scheme he undertook, and what he had promised the

bishop he duly fulfilled. After a rather lengthy interview with Mrs Pendle and her daughter, he succeeded in arousing their interest in Nauheim and its baths: so much so, that before he left the palace they were as eager to go as formerly they had been to stay. This seeming miracle was accomplished mainly by a skilful appeal to Mrs Pendle's love for experimenting with new medical discoveries in connection with her health. She had never tried the Schott treatment for heart dilation, and indeed had heard very little about it; but when fully informed on the subject, her interest in it was soon awakened. She soon came to look on the carbolic spring of Nauheim as the true fountain of youth, and was sanguine that by bathing for a few weeks in its life-giving waters she would return to Beorminster hale and hearty, and full of vitality. If ever hope told a flattering tale, she did to Mrs Pendle through the lips of cunning Dr Graham.

'I thought you knew nothing about new medicines or treatments,' she observed graciously; 'or, if you did, that you were too conservative to prescribe them. I see I was wrong.'

'You were decidedly wrong, Mrs Pendle. It is only a fool who ceases to acquire knowledge and benefit by it. I am not a cabbage although I do live in a vegetable garden.'

Lucy's consent was gained through the glowing description of the benefit her mother would receive from the Nauheim waters, and the opportune arrival of Sir Harry Brace contributed to the wished-for result. The ardent lover immediately declared his willingness to escort Lucy to the world's end. Whichever Lucy was, the Garden of Eden blossomed; and while Mrs Pendle was being pickled and massaged and put to bed for recuperative slumbers, he hoped to have his future wife all to himself. In her sweet company even the dull little German watering-place would prove a Paradise. Cupid is the sole miracle-worker in these days of scepticism.

'It is all right, bishop!' said the victorious doctor. 'The ladies will be off, with Brace in attendance, as soon as they can pack up a waggon load of feminine frippery.'

'I am sincerely glad to hear it,' said Dr Pendle, and heaved a sigh of relief which made Graham wag his head and put in a word of advice.

'You must take a trip yourself, my lord,' he said decisively; 'nothing like change for mental worry. Go to Bath, or Putney, or Jericho, bishop; travel is your anodyne.'

'I cannot leave Beorminster just now, Graham. When I can I shall take your advice.'

The doctor shrugged his shoulders and walked towards the door. There he paused and looked back at the unhappy face of the bishop. A thought struck him and he returned.

'Pendle,' he said gently, 'I am your oldest friend and one who honours and respects you above all men. Why not tell me your trouble and let me help you? I shall keep your secret, whatever it may be.'

'I have no fears on that score, Graham. If I could trust anyone I should trust you; but I cannot tell you what is in my mind. No useful result would come of such candour, for only the One above can help me out of my difficulties.'

'Is it money worries, bishop?'

'No, my worldly affairs are most prosperous.'

'It is not this murder that is troubling you, I suppose?'

The bishop became as pale as the paper on the desk before him, and convulsively clutched the arms of his chair. 'The—the murderer!' he stammered, 'the murderer, Graham. Why should that trouble me?'

'Cargrim told me that you were greatly upset that such a thing should have occurred in your diocese.'

'I am annoyed about it,' replied Pendle, in a low voice, 'but it is not the untimely death of that unhappy man which worries me.'

'Then I give it up,' said the doctor, with another shrug.

'Graham!'

'Yes, what is it?'

'Do you think that there is any chance of the murderer of this man being discovered?'

'If the case had been handled by a London detective while the clues were fresh I daresay there might have been a chance,' replied the doctor. 'But that mutton-headed Tinkler has made such a muddle of the affair that I am certain the murderer will never be captured.'

'Has anything new been discovered since the inquest?'

'Nothing. So far as I know, Tinkler is satisfied and the matter is at an end. Whosoever killed Jentham has only his own conscience to fear.'

'And God!' said the bishop, softly.

'I always understood that what you Churchmen call conscience was the still small voice of the Deity,' replied Graham, drily; 'there is no use in being tautological, bishop. Well, good-day, my lord.'

'Good-day, doctor, and many, many thanks for your kindly help.'

'Not at all. I only wish that you would let me help you to some purpose by treating me as your friend and unburdening your mind. There is one great truth that you should become a convert to, bishop.'

'Ay, ay, what is that?' said Pendle, listlessly.

'That medical men are the father-confessors of Protestantism. Good-day!'

Outside the library Cargrim was idling

about, in the hope of picking up some crumbs of information, when Graham took his departure. But the little doctor, who was not in the best of tempers for another conversation, shot past the chaplain like a bolt from the bow; and by the time Cargrim recovered from such brusque treatment was half-way down the avenue, fuming and fretting at his inability to understand the attitude of Bishop Pendle. Dr Graham loved a secret as a magpie does a piece of stolen money, and he was simply frantic to find out what vexed his friend; the more so as he believed that he could help him to bear his trouble by sympathy, and perhaps by advice do away with it altogether. He could not even make a guess at the bishop's hidden trouble, and ran over all known crimes in his mind, from murder to arson, without coming to any conclusion. Yet something extraordinary must be the matter to move so easy-going, healthy a man as Dr Pendle.

'I know more of his life than most people,' thought Graham, as he trotted briskly along, 'and there is nothing in it that I can see to upset him so. He hasn't forged, or coined, or murdered, or sold himself to Pluto-Pan Satan so far as I know; and he is too clear-headed and sane to have a monomania about a non-existent trouble. Dear, dear,' the doctor shook his head sadly, 'I shall never understand human nature; there is always an abyss below an abyss, and the firmest seeming ground is usually quagmire when you come to step on it. George Pendle is a riddle which would puzzle the Sphinx. Hum! hum! another fabulous beast. Well, well, I can only wait and watch until I discover the truth, and then—well, what then?—why, nothing!' And Graham, having talked himself into a *cul-de-sac* of thought, shook his head furiously and strove to dismiss the matter from his too inquisitive mind. But not all his philosophy and will could accomplish the impossible. 'We are a finite lot of fools,' said he, 'and when we think we know most we know least. How that nameless Unseen Power must smile at our attempts to scale the stars,' by which remark it will be seen that Dr Graham was not the atheist Beornminster believed him to be. And here may end his speculations for the present.

Shortly, Mrs Pendle and Lucy began to pack a vast number of boxes with garments needful and ornamental, and sufficient in quantity to last them for at least twelve months. It is true that they intended to remain away only eight weeks, but the preparations for departure were worthy of the starting out of a crusade. They must take this; they could certainly not leave that; warm dresses were needed for possible cold weather; cool frocks were requisite for probable hot days; they must have smart dresses as they would no doubt go out a great deal; and three or four tea-gowns each, as they

might stay indoors altogether. In short, their stock of millinery would have clothed at least half-a-dozen women, although both ladies protested plaintively that they had absolutely nothing to wear, and that it would be necessary to go shopping in London for a few days, if only to make themselves look presentable. Harry Brace, the thoughtless bachelor, was struck dumb when he saw the immense quantity of luggage which went off in and on a bus to the railway station in the charge of a nurse and a lady's-maid.

'Oh, Lord!' said he, aghast, 'are we starting out on an African expedition, Lucy?'

'Well, I'm sure, Harry, mamma and I are only taking what is absolutely necessary. Other women would take twice as much.'

'Wait until you and Lucy leave for your honeymoon, Brace,' said the Bishop, with a smile at his prospective son-in-law's long face. 'She will be one of the other women then.'

'In that case,' said Harry, a trifle grimly, 'Lucy will have to decide if I am to go as a bridegroom or a luggage agent.'

Of course all Beorminster knew that Mrs Pendle was going to Nauheim for the treatment; and of course all Beorminster—that is, the feminine portion of it—came to take tender farewells of the travellers. Every day up to the moment of departure Mrs Pendle's drawing-room was crowded with ladies all relating their experiences of English and Continental travelling. Lucy took leave of at least a dozen dear friends; and from the way in which Mrs Pendle was lamented over, and blessed, and warned, and advised by the wives of the inferior clergy, one would have thought that her destination was the moon, and that she would never get back again. Altogether the palace was no home for a quiet prelate in those days.

At the last moment Mrs Pendle found that she would be wretched if her bishop did not accompany her some way on the journey; so Dr Pendle went with the travellers to London, and spent a pleasant day or so, being hurried about from shop to shop. If he had not been the most angelic bishop in England he would have revolted; but as he was anxious that his wife should have no cause of complaint, he exhausted himself with the utmost amiability. But the longest lane has a turning, and the day came when Mrs Pendle and Lucy, attended by the dazed Harry, left for Nauheim *via* Queenborough, Flushing and Cologne. Mrs Pendle declared, as the train moved away, that she was thoroughly exhausted, which statement the bishop quite believed. His wonder was that she and Lucy were not dead and buried.

On returning to the empty palace, Bishop Pendle settled himself down for a long rest. Remembering Graham's hint, he saw as

little of Cargrim as was compatible with the relationship of business. The chaplain noted that he was being avoided, and guessing that someone had placed Dr Pendle on his guard against him, became more secretive and watchful than ever. But in spite of all his spying he met with little success, for although the bishop still continued weary-eyed and worried-looking, he went about his work with more zest than usual. Indeed, he attended so closely to the duties of his position that Cargrim fancied he was trying to forget his wickedness by distracting his mind. But, as usual, the chaplain had no tangible reason for this belief.

And about this time, when most industrious, the bishop began to be haunted, not by a ghost, which would have been bearable, as ghosts appear usually only in the night-time, but by a queer little old woman in a red cloak, who supported herself with a crutch and looked like a wicked fairy. This, as the bishop ascertained by a casual question, was Mother Jael, the gipsy friend of Jentham, and the knowledge of her identity did not make him the easier in his mind. He could not conceive what she meant by her constant attendance on him; and but that he believed in the wisdom of letting sleeping dogs lie, he would have resented her pertinacity. The sight of her became almost insupportable.

Whether Mother Jael intended to terrify the bishop or not it is hard to say, but the way in which she followed him tormented him beyond measure. When he left the palace she was there on the road; when he preached in the cathedral she lurked among the congregation; when he strolled about Beorminster she watched him round corners, but she never approached him, she never spoke to him, and frequently vanished as mysteriously and unexpectedly as she appeared. Wherever he went, wherever he looked, that crimson cloak was sure to meet his eye. Mother Jael was old and bent and witch-like, with elf locks of white hair and a yellow, wrinkled face; but her eyes burned like two fiery stars under her frosted brows, and with these she stared hard at Bishop Pendle, until he felt almost mesmerised by the intensity of her gaze. She became a perfect nightmare to the man, much the same as the little old woman of the coffer was to Abudah, the merchant in the fantastic eastern tale; but, unlike that pertinacious beldam, she apparently had no message to deliver. She only stared and stared with her glittering, evil eyes, until the bishop—his nerves not being under control with this constant persecution—almost fancied that the powers of darkness had leagued themselves against him, and had sent this hell-hag to haunt and torment him.

Several times he strove to speak to her, for he thought that even the proverb of sleeping

dogs might be acted upon too literally ; but Mother Jael always managed to shuffle out of the way. She appeared to have the power of disintegrating her body, for where she disappeared to on these occasions the bishop never could find out. One minute he would see her in her red cloak, leaning on her crutch and staring at him steadily, but let him take one step in her direction and she would vanish like a ghost. No wonder the bishop's nerves began to give way ; the constant sight of that silent figure with its menacing gaze would have driven many a man out of his mind, but Dr Pendle resisted the panic which seized him at times, and strove to face the apparition—for Mother Jael's flittings deserved such a name—with control and calmness. But the effort was beyond his strength at times.

As the weeks went by, Cargrim also began to notice the persecution of Mother Jael, and connecting her with Jentharn and Jentharn with the bishop, he began to wonder if she knew the truth about the murder. It was not improbable, he thought, that she might be possessed of more important knowledge than she had imparted to the police, and a single word from her might bring home the crime to the bishop. If he was innocent, why did she haunt him? But again, if he was guilty, why did she avoid him? To gain an answer to this riddle, Cargrim attempted when possible to seize the elusive phantom of Mother Jael, but three or four times she managed to vanish in her witch-like way. At length one day when she was watching the bishop talking to the dean at the northern door of the cathedral, Cargrim came softly behind her and seized her arm. Mother Jael turned with a squeak like a trapped rabbit.

'Why do you watch the bishop?' asked Cargrim, sharply.

'Bless ye, lovey, I don't watch 'im,' whined Mother Jael, cringing.

'Nonsense, I've seen you look at him several times.'

'There ain't no harm in that, my lamb. They do say as a cat kin look at a queen ; and why not a pore gipsy at a noble bishop? I say, dearie,' she added, in a hoarse whisper, 'what's his first name?'

'The bishop's first name? George. Why do you want to know?'

'George!' pondered Mother Jael, taking no notice of the question, 'I allays though' the sojir was George!'

'He is George too, called after his father. Answer me ! Why do you want to know the bishop's name? and why do you watch him?'

'Ah, my noble Gorgio, that's tellings!'

'No doubt, so just tell it to me.'

'Lord, lovey ! the likes of you don't want to know what the likes of me thinks.'

Cargrim lost his temper at these evasions. 'You are a bad character, Mother Jael. I shall warn the police about you.'

'Oh, tiny Jesus, hear him ! I ain't done nothing wrong. I'm a pore old gipsy ; strike me dead if I ain't.'

'If you tell me something,' said Cargrim, changing his tactics, 'you shall have this, and he produced a coin.

Mother Jael eyed the bright half-sovereign he held between finger and thumb, and her old eyes glistened. 'Yes, dearie, yes ! What is it?'

'Tell me the truth about the murder,' whispered Cargrim, with a glance in the direction of the bishop.

Mother Jael gave a shrill screech, grabbed the half-sovereign, and shuffled away so rapidly that she was round the corner before Cargrim could recover from his surprise. At once he followed, but in spite of all his search he could not find the old hag. Yet she had her eye on him.

'George ! and George !' said Mother Jael, who was watching him from an odd angle of the wall into which she had squeezed herself, 'I wonder which of 'em did it ?'

CHAPTER XXI

MRS PANSEY'S FESTIVAL

ONCE a year the archdeacon's widow discharged her social obligations by throwing open the gaol in which she dwelt. Her festival, to which all that Beorminster could boast of in the way of society was invited, usually took the form of an out-of-door party, as Mrs Pansey found that she could receive more people, and trouble herself less about their entertainment, by filling her grounds than by crushing them into the rather small reception-rooms of her house. Besides, the gardens were really charming, and the wide-spreading green of the lawns, surrounded by ample flower-beds, now brilliant with rainbow blossoms, looked most picturesque when thronged with well-dressed, well-bred, well-pleased guests. Nearly all the invitations had been accepted ; firstly, because Mrs Pansey made things unpleasant afterwards for such defiant spirits as stayed away ; secondly, for the very attractive reason that the meat and drink provided by the hostess were of the best. Thus Mrs Pansey's entertainments were usually the most successful of the Beorminster season.

On this auspicious occasion the clerk of the weather had granted the hostess an especially fine day. Sunshine filled the cloudless arch of the blue sky ; the air was warm, but tempered by a softly-blowing breeze ; and the guests, to do honour at once to Mrs Pansey and the delightful weather, wore their most becoming and coolest costumes. Pretty girls laughed in the sunshine ; matrons

gossiped beneath the rustling trees; and the sober black coats of the clerical element subdued the too vivid tints of the feminine frippery. The scene was animated and full of colour and movement, so that even Mrs Pansey's grim countenance expanded into an unusual smile when greeting fresh arrivals. At intervals a band played lively dance music; there was croquet and lawn-tennis for the young; iced coffee and scandal for the old. Altogether, the company, being mostly youthful and unthinking, was enjoying itself immensely, as the chatter and laughter, and smiling and bowing amply testified.

'Altogether, I may regard it as a distinct success,' said Mrs Pansey, as, attired in her most Hamlet-like weeds, she received her guests under the shade of a many-coloured Japanese umbrella. 'And the gardens really look nice.'

'The gardens of Paradise!' observed the complimentary Cargrim, who was smirking at the elbow of his hostess.

'Don't distort Holy Writ, if — you — please!' snapped Mrs Pansey, who still reserved the right of being disagreeable even at her own entertainment; 'but if you do call this the Garden of Eden, I daresay there are plenty of serpents about.'

'And many Adams and Eves!' said Dr Graham, surveying the company with his usual cynicism; 'but I don't see Lilith, Mrs Pansey.'

'Lilith, Dr! what an improper name!'

'And what an improper person, my dear lady. Lilith was the other wife of Father Adam.'

'How dare you, Dr Graham! the first man a bigamist! Ridiculous! Profane! Only one rib was taken out of Adam!'

'Lilith wasn't manufactured out of a rib, Mrs Pansey. The devil created her to deceive Adam. At least, so the Rabbinitists tell us!'

'Oh, those Jewish creatures!' said the lady, with a sniff. 'I don't think much of their opinion. What do Jews know about the Bible?'

'As much as authors generally know about their own books, I suppose,' said Graham, drily.

'We are becoming theological,' observed Cargrim, smoothly.

'Not to say blasphemous,' growled Mrs Pansey; 'at least, the doctor is, like all sceptics of his infidel profession. Remember Ananias and his lies, sir.'

'I shall rather remember Eve and her curiosity,' laughed Graham, 'and to follow so good an example let me inquire what yonder very pretty tent contains, Mrs Pansey?'

'That is a piece of Daisy's foolishness, doctor. It contains a gipsy, whom she induced me to hire for some fortune-telling rubbish.'

'Oh, how sweet! how jolly!' cried a mixed chorus of young voices. 'A real gipsy, Mrs Pansey?' and the good lady was besieged with questions.

'She is cunning and dirty enough to be genuine, my dears. Some of you may know her, Mother Jael!'

'Aroint thee, witch!' cried Dr Graham, 'that old beldam; oh, she can "pen dukherin" to some purpose. I have heard of her; so have the police.'

'What language is that?' asked Miss Whichello, who came up at this moment with a smile and a word for all; 'it sounds like swearing.'

'I'd like to see anyone swear here,' said Mrs Pansey, grimly.

'Set your mind at rest, dear lady, I was speaking Romany—the black language—the calo jib which the gipsies brought from the East when they came to plunder the hencoops of Europe.'

'Do you mean to tell me that those creatures have a language of their own?' asked Miss Whichello, disbelievingly.

'Why not? I daresay their ancestors made bricks on the plain of Shinar, and were lucky enough to gain a language without the trouble of learning it.'

'You allude to the Tower of Babel, sir!' said Mrs Pansey, with a scowl.

'Rather to the Tower of Fable, dear lady, since the whole story is a myth.'

Not caring to hear this duel of words, and rather surprised to learn that Mother Jael was present, Cargrim slipped away at the first opportunity to ponder over the information and consider what use he could make of it. So the old woman still followed the bishop?—had followed him even into society, and had made herself Mrs Pansey's professional fortune-teller so that she might still continue to vex the eyes of her victim with the sight of her eternal red cloak. Dr Pendle was at that very moment walking amongst the guests, with his youngest son by his side, and appeared to be more cheerful and more like his former self than he had been for some time. Apparently he was as yet ignorant that Mother Jael was in his immediate vicinity; but Cargrim determined that he should be warned of her presence as speedily as possible, and be lured into having an interview with her so that his scheming chaplain might see what would come of the meeting. Also Cargrim resolved to see the old gipsy himself and renew the conversation which she had broken off when she had thieved his gold. In one way or another he foresaw that it would be absolutely necessary to force the woman into making some definite statement either inculpating or exonerating the bishop in respect of Jentharn's death. Therefore, having come to this conclusion, Cargrim strolled watchfully through the merry crowd.

It was his purpose to inform Dr Pendle that Mother Jael was telling fortunes in the gaily-striped tent, and his determination to bring—if possible—the prelate into contact with the old hag. From such a meeting artful Mr Cargrim hoped to gather some useful information from the conversation and behaviour of the pair.

Unfortunately Cargrim was impeded in the execution of this scheme from the fact of his remarkable popularity. He could not take two steps without being addressed by one or more of his lady admirers; and although he saw the bishop no great distance away, he could not reach him by reason of the detaining sirens. As gracefully as possible he eluded their snares, but when confronted by Daisy Norsham hanging on the arm of Dean Alder, he almost gave up hope of reaching his goal. There was but little chance of escape from Daisy and her small talk. Moreover, she was rather bored by the instructive conversation of the ancient parson, and wanted to attach herself to some younger and more frivolous man. Cupid in cap and gown and spectacles is a decidedly prosy divinity.

'Oh, dear Mr Cargrim!' cried the gushing Daisy, 'is it really you? Oh, how very sweet of you to come to-day! And what is the very latest news of poor, dear Mrs Pendle?'

'I believe the Nauheim baths are doing her a great deal of good, Miss Norsham. If you will excuse—'

'Nauheim!' croaked the dean, with a dry cough, 'is unknown to me save as a geographical expression, but the town of Baden-Baden, formerly called Aurelia Aquensis, was much frequented by the Romans on account of its salubrious and health-giving springs. I may also instance Aachen, vulgarly termed Aix-la-Chapelle, but known to the Latins as Aquisgranum or—'

'How interesting!' interrupted Daisy, cutting short this stream of information. 'You do seem to know everything, Mr Dean. The only German watering-place I have been to is Wiesbaden, where the doctors made me get up at five o'clock to drink the waters. And fancy, Mr Cargrim, a band played at the Kochbrunnen at seven in the morning. Did you ever hear anything so horrid?'

'Music at so early an hour would be trying, Miss Norsham!'

'Aqua Mattiacæ was the Roman appellation of Wiesbaden,' murmured Dr Alder, twiddling his eye-glass. 'I hear on good medical authority that the waters are most beneficial to renovate health and arrest decay. I should advise his lordship, the bishop, to visit the springs, for of late I have noticed that he appears to be sadly out of sorts.'

'He is looking much better to-day,' observed the chaplain, with a glance at the bishop, who was now conversing with Miss Whichello.

'Oh, the poor, dear bishop should have his fortune told by Mother Jael.'

'That would hardly be in keeping with his exalted position, Miss Norsham.'

'Oh, really, I don't see that it is so very dreadful,' cried Daisy, with one of her silvery peals of artificial laughter, 'and it's only fun. Mother Jael might tell him if he was going to be ill or not, you know, and he could take medicine if he was. Besides, she does tell the truth; oh, really, it's too awful what she knew about me. But I'm glad to say she prophesied a lovely future.'

'Marriage and money, I presume.'

'Well, you are clever, Mr Cargrim; that is just the fortune she told me. How did you guess? I'm to meet my future husband here; he is to be rich and adore me, and I'm to be very, very happy.'

'I am sure so charming a young lady deserves to be,' said Cargrim, bowing.

'Siderum regina bicornis audi, Luna puellas,' quoted Mr Dean, with a side glance at the radiant Daisy; and if that confident lady had understood Latin, she would have judged from this satirical quotation that Dr Alder was not so subjugated by her charms as to contemplate matrimony. But being ignorant, she was—in accordance with the proverb—blissful, and babbled on with a never-failing stream of small talk, which was at times momentarily obstructed by the heavy masses of information cast into it by the dean.

Leaving this would-be May and wary old December to their unequal flirtation, Cargrim again attempted to reach the bishop, but was captured by Miss Tancred, much to his disgust. She entertained him with a long and minute account of her rheumatic pains and the means by which she hoped to cure them. Held thus as firmly as the wedding guest was by the Ancient Mariner, Cargrim lost the chance of hearing a very interesting conversation between Miss Whichello and the bishop; but, from the clouded brow of Dr Pendle, he saw that something was wrong, and chafed at his enforced detention. Nevertheless, Miss Tancred kept him beside her until she exhausted her trickle of small talk. It took all Cargrim's tact and politeness and Christianity to endure patiently her gabble.

'Yes, bishop,' Miss Whichello was saying, with some annoyance, 'your son has admired my niece for some considerable time. Lately they became engaged, but I refused to give my consent until your sanction and approval had been obtained.'

'George has said nothing to me on the subject,' replied Dr Pendle, in a vexed tone. 'Yet he should certainly have done so before speaking to your niece.'

'No doubt! but unfortunately young men's heads do not always guide their hearts. Still, Captain Pendle promised me to tell you all during his present visit to Beorminster. And,

of course, both Mrs Pendle and your daughter Lucy know of his love for Mab.

'It would appear that I am the sole person ignorant of the engagement, Miss Whichello.'

'It was not with my consent that you were kept in ignorance, bishop. But I really do not see why you should discourage the match. You can see for yourself that they make a handsome pair.'

Dr Pendle cast an angry look towards the end of the lawn, where George and Mab were talking earnestly together.

'I don't deny their physical suitability,' he said severely, 'but more than good looks are needed to make a happy marriage.'

'Am I to understand that you disapprove of my niece?' cried the little old lady, drawing herself up.

'By no means; by no means; how can you think me so wanting in courtesy? But I must confess that I desire my son to make a good match.'

'You should rather wish him to get a good wife,' retorted Miss Whichello, who was becoming annoyed. 'But if it is fortune you desire, I can set your mind at rest on that point. Mab will inherit my money when I die; and should she marry Captain Pendle during my lifetime, I shall allow the young couple a thousand a year.'

'A thousand a year, Miss Whichello!'

'Yes! and more if necessary. Let me tell you, bishop, I am much better off than people think.'

The bishop, rather nonplussed, looked down at his neat boots and very becoming gaiters. 'I am not so worldly-minded as you infer, Miss Whichello,' said he, mildly; 'and did George desire to marry a poor girl, I have enough money of my own to humour his whim. But if his heart is set on making Miss Arden his wife, I should like—if you will pardon my candour—to know more about the young lady.'

'Mab is the best and most charming girl in the world,' said the little Jennie Wren, pale, and a trifle nervous.

'I can see that for myself. You misunderstand me, Miss Whichello, so I must speak more explicitly. Who is Miss Arden?'

'She is my niece,' replied Miss Whichello, with trembling dignity. 'The only child of my poor sister, who died when Mab was an infant in arms.'

'Quite so!' assented the bishop, with a nod. 'I have always understood such to be the case. But—er—Mr Arden?'

'Mr Arden!' faltered the old lady, turning her face from the company, that its pallor and anxiety might not be seen.

'Her father! is he alive?'

'No!' cried Miss Whichello, shaking her head. 'He died long, long ago.'

'Who was he?'

'A—a—a gentleman!—a gentleman of independent fortune.'

Dr Pendle bit his nether lip and looked embarrassed. 'Miss Whichello,' he said at length, in a hesitating tone, 'your niece is a charming young lady, and, so far as she herself is concerned, is quite fit to become the wife of my son George.'

'I should think so indeed!' cried the little lady, with buckram civility.

'But,' continued the bishop, with emphasis, 'I have heard rumours about her parentage which do not satisfy me. Whether these are true or not is best known to yourself, Miss Whichello; but before consenting to the engagement you speak of, I should like to be fully informed on the point.'

'To what rumours does your lordship refer?' asked Miss Whichello, very pale-faced, but very quiet.

'This is neither the time nor place to inform you,' said the bishop, hastily; 'I see Mr Cargrim advancing. On another occasion, Miss Whichello, we shall talk about the matter.'

As the chaplain, with three or four young ladies, including Miss Norsham, was bearing down on the bishop, Miss Whichello recognised the justice of his speech, and not feeling equal to talk frivolity, she hastily retreated and ran into the house to fight down her emotion. What the poor little woman felt was known only to herself; but she foresaw that the course of true love, so far as it concerned George and Mab, was not likely to run smooth. Still, she put a brave face on it and hoped for the best.

In the meantime, Bishop Pendle was enveloped in a whirl of petticoats, as Cargrim's Amazonian escort, prompted by the chaplain, was insisting that he should have his fortune told by Mother Jael. The bishop looked perturbed on hearing that his red-cloaked phantom was so close at hand, but he managed to keep his countenance, and laughingly refused to comply with the demand of the ladies.

'Think of what the newspapers would say,' he urged, 'if a bishop were to consult this Witch of Endor.'

'Oh, but really, it is only a joke!'

'A dignitary of the Church shouldn't joke, Miss Norsham.'

'Why not, your lordship?' put in Cargrim, amiably. 'I have heard that Richelieu played with a kitten.'

'I am not Richelieu,' replied Dr Pendle, drily, 'nor is Mother Jael a kitten.'

'It's for a charity, bishop,' said Daisy, imploringly. 'I pay Mother Jael for the day, and give the rest to Mrs Pansey's Home for servants out of work.'

'Oh, for a charity,' repeated Dr Pendle, smiling; 'that puts quite a different complexion on the question. What do you say, Mr Cargrim?'

'I don't think that your lordship can refuse the prayer of these charming young ladies,' replied the chaplain, obsequiously.

Now, the bishop really wished to see Mother Jael in order to learn why she haunted him so persistently ; and as she had always vanished heretofore, he thought that the present would be a very good time to catch her. He therefore humoured the joke of fortune-telling for his own satisfaction, and explained as much to the expectant company.

'Well, well, young ladies,' said he, good-naturedly, 'I suppose I must consent to be victimised if only to further the charitable purposes of Mrs Pansey. Where dwells the sibyl ?'

'In this tent ! This way, your lordship !'

Dr Pendle advanced towards the gaily-striped tent, smiling broadly, and with a playful shake of the head at the laughing nymphs around, he invaded the privacy of Mother Jael. With a sigh of relief at having accomplished his purpose, Cargrim let fall the flap which he had held up for the bishop's entry, and turned away, rubbing his hands. His aim was attained. It now remained to be seen what would come of the meeting between bishop and gipsy.

CHAPTER XXII

MR MOSK IS INDISCREET

WHILE the bishop was conversing with Miss Whichello about the engagement of George and Mab, the young people themselves were discussing the self-same subject with much ardour. Captain Pendle had placed two chairs near a quick-set hedge, beyond the hearing of other guests, and on these he and Mab were seated as closely as was possible without attracting the eyes of onlookers. Their attitude and actions were guarded and indifferent for the misleading of the company, but their conversation, not being likely to be overheard, was confidential and lover-like enough. No spectator from casual observation could have guessed their secret.

'You must tell your father about our engagement at once,' said Mab, with decision. 'He should have known of it before I consented to wear this ring.'

'I'll tell him to-morrow, dearest, although I am sorry that Lucy and the mater are not here to support me.'

'But you don't think that he will object to me, George ?'

'I—should—think—not !' replied Captain Pendle, smiling at the very idea ; 'object to have the prettiest daughter-in-law in the county. You don't know what an eye for beauty the bishop has.'

'If you are so sure of his consent I wonder you did not tell him before,' pouted Mab. 'Aunty has been very angry at my keeping our engagement secret.'

'Darling, you know it isn't a secret. We told Cargrim, and when he is aware of it the whole town is. I didn't want to tell my father until I was sure you would marry me.'

'You have been sure of that for a long time.'

'In a sort of way,' asserted Captain Pendle ; 'but I was not absolutely certain until I placed a ring on that pretty hand. Now, I'll tell my father, get his episcopalian benediction, and wire the news to Lucy and the mater. We shall be married in spring. Miss Whichello will be the bridesmaid, and all will be hay and sunshine.'

'What nonsense you talk, George !'

'I'd do more than talk nonsense if the eyes of Europe were not on us. Mother Jael is telling fortunes in that tent, my fairy queen, so let us go in and question her about the future. Besides,' added George, with an insinuating smile, 'I don't suppose she would mind if I gave you one kiss.'

Mab laughed and shook her head. 'You will have to dispense with both kiss and fortune for the present,' said she, 'for your father has this moment gone into the tent.'

'What ! is Saul also among the prophets ?' cried George, with uplifted eyebrows. 'Won't there be a shine in the tents of Shem when it is published abroad that Bishop Pendle has patronised the Witch of Endor. I wonder what he wants to know. Surely the scroll of his fortune is made up.'

'George,' said Mab, gravely, 'your father has been much worried lately.'

'About what ? By whom ?'

'I don't know, but he looks worried.'

'Oh, he is fidgeting because my mother is away ; he always fusses about her health like a hen with one chick.'

'Be more respectful, my dear,' corrected Mab, demurely.

'I'll be anything you like, sweet prude, if you'll only fly with me far from this madding crowd. Hang it ! here is someone coming to disturb us.'

'It is your brother.'

'So it is. Hullo, Gabriel, why that solemn brow ?'

'I have just heard bad news,' said Gabriel, pausing before them. 'Old Mr Leigh is dying.'

'What ! the rector of Heathcroft ? I don't call that bad news, old boy, seeing that his death gives you your step.'

'George !' cried Mab and Gabriel in a breath, 'how can you ?'

'Well, Leigh is old and ripe enough to die, isn't he ?' said the incorrigible George. 'Remember what the old Scotch sexton said to the weeping mourners, "What are ye greeting aboot ? If ye dinna bring them at eighty, when wull ye bring them ?" My Scotch accent is bad,' added Captain Pendle, 'but the story itself is a thing of beauty.'

'I want to tell my father the news,' said Gabriel, indignantly turning away from George's wink. 'Where is he?'

'With Moth— Oh, there he is,' cried Mab, as the bishop issued from the sibyl's tent. 'Oh, George, how ill he looks!'

'By Jove, yes! He is as pale as a ghost. Come and see what is wrong, Gabriel. Excuse me a moment, Mab.'

The two brothers walked forward, but before they could reach their father he was already taking his leave and shaking hands with Mrs Pansey. His face was white, his eyes were anxious, and it was only by sheer force of will that he could excuse himself to his hostess in his ordinary voice.

'I am afraid the sun has been too much for me, Mrs Pansey,' he said in his usual suave tones, 'and the close atmosphere of that tent is rather trying. I regret being obliged to leave so charming a scene, but I feel sure you will excuse me.'

'Certainly, bishop,' said Mrs Pansey, graciously enough, 'but won't you have a glass of sherry or—'

'Nothing, thank you; nothing. Good-bye, Mrs Pansey; your *fête* has been most successful. Ah, Gabriel,' catching sight of his youngest son, 'will you be so good as to come with me?'

'Are you ill, sir?' asked George, with solicitude.

'No, no! a little out of sorts, perhaps. The sun, merely the sun;' and waving his hand in a hurried manner, Dr Pendle withdrew as quickly as his dignity permitted, leaning on Gabriel's arm. The curate's face was as colourless as that of his father, and he seemed equally as nervous in manner. Captain Pendle returned to Mab in a state of bewilderment, for which there was surely sufficient cause.

'I never saw the bishop so put out before,' said he with a puzzled look. 'Old Mother Jael must have prophesied blue ruin and murder.'

Murder! The ominous word struck on the ears of Cargrim, who was passing at the moment, and he smiled cruelly as he heard the half-joking tone in which it was spoken. Captain George Pendle little thought that the chaplain took his jesting speech in earnest, and was more convinced than ever that the bishop had killed Jenthal, and had just been warned by Mother Jael that she knew the truth. This then, as Cargrim considered, was her reason for haunting the bishop in his incomings and outgoings.

Of course it was impossible that the bishop's agitation could have escaped the attention of the assembled guests, and many remarks were made as to its probable cause. His sudden illness at his own reception was recalled, and, taken in conjunction with this seizure, it was observed that Dr Pendle was working too hard, that his constitution was breaking

up and that he sadly needed a rest. The opinion on this last point was unanimous.

'For I will say,' remarked Mrs Pansey, who was an adept at damning with faint praise, 'that the bishop works as hard as his capacity of brain will let him.'

'And that is a great deal,' said Dr Graham, tartly. 'Bishop Pendle is one of the cleverest men in England.'

'That is right, doctor,' replied the undaunted Mrs Pansey. 'Always speak well of your patients.'

Altogether, so high stood the bishop's reputation as a transparently honest man that no one suspected anything was wrong save Graham and Mr Cargrim. The former remembered Dr Pendle's unacknowledged secret, and wondered if the gipsy was in possession of it, while the latter was satisfied that the bishop had been driven away by the fears roused by Mother Jael's communication, whatever that might be. But the general opinion was that too much work and too much sun had occasioned the bishop's illness, and it was spoken of very lightly as a mere temporary ailment soon to be set right by complete change and complete rest. Thus Dr Pendle's reputation of the past stood him in good stead, and saved his character thoroughly in the present.

'Now,' said Cargrim to himself, 'I know for certain that Mother Jael is aware of the truth, also that the truth implicates the bishop in Jenthal's death. I shall just go in and question her at once. She can't escape from that tent so easily as she vanished the other day.'

But Cargrim quite underrated Mother Jael's power of making herself scarce, for when he entered the tent he found it tenanted only by Daisy Norsham, who was looking in some bewilderment at an empty chair. The cunning old gipsy had once more melted into thin air.

'Where is she?' demanded Cargrim, regretting that his clerical garb prevented him from using appropriate language.

'Oh, really, dear Mr Cargrim, I don't know. After the dear bishop came out so upset with the heat, we all ran to look after him, so I suppose Mother Jael felt the heat also, and left while our backs were turned. It is really very vexing,' sighed Daisy, 'for lots of girls are simply dying to have their fortunes told. And, oh!' making a sudden discovery, 'how very, very dreadful!'

'What is it?' asked the chaplain, staring at her tragic face.

'That wicked old woman has taken all the money. Oh, poor Mrs. Pansey's home!'

'She has no doubt run off with the money,' said Cargrim, in what was for him a savage tone. 'I must question the servants about her departure. Miss Norsham, I am afraid that your beautiful nature has been imposed upon by this deceitful vagrant.'

Whether this was so or not, one thing was clear, that Mother Jael had gone off with a considerable amount of loose silver in her pocket. The servants knew nothing of her departure, so there was no doubt that the old crone, used to dodging and hiding, had slipped out of the garden by some back way, while the guests had been commiserating the bishop's slight illness. As Cargrim wanted to see the gipsy at once, and hoped to force her into confessing the truth by threatening to have her arrested with the stolen money in her pocket, he followed on her trail while it was yet fresh. Certainly Mother Jael had left no particular track by which she could be traced, but Cargrim, knowing something of her habits, judged that she would either strike across Southberry Heath to the tents of her tribe or take refuge for the time being at The Derby Winner. It was more probable that she would go to the hotel than run the risk of being arrested in the gipsy camp, so Cargrim, adopting this argument, took his way down to Eastgate. He hoped to run Mother Jael to earth in the tap-room of the hotel.

On arriving at The Derby Winner, he walked straight into the bar, and found it presided over by a grinning pot-boy. A noise of singing and shouting came from the little parlour at the back, and when the chaplain asked for Mr Mosk, he was informed by the smiling Ganymede that 'th' guv'nor was injiyin' of hisself, and goin' on like one o'clock.'

'Dear! dear!' said the scandalised chaplain, 'am I to understand that your master has taken more than is good for him?'

'Yuss; he's jist drunk up to jolliness, sir.'

'And Miss Mosk?'

'She's a-tryin' to git 'im t' bed, is young missus, an' old missus is cryin' upstairs.'

'I shall certainly speak about this to the authorities,' said Cargrim, in an angry tone. 'You are sober enough to answer my questions, I hope?'

'Yuss, sir; I'm strite,' growled the pot-boy, pulling his forelock.

'Then tell me if that gipsy woman, Mother Jael, is here?'

'No, sir, sh' ain't. I ain't set eyes on 'er for I do'no how long.'

The man spoke earnestly enough, and was evidently telling the truth. Much disappointed to find that the old crone was not in the neighbourhood, the chaplain was about to depart when he heard Mosk begin to sing in a husky voice, and also became aware that Bell, as he judged from the raised tones of her voice, was scolding her father thoroughly. His sense of duty got the better of his anxiety to find Mother Jael, and feeling that his presence was re-

quired, he passed swiftly to the back of the house, and threw open the door of the parlour with fine clerical indignation.

'What is all this noise, Mosk?' he cried sharply. 'Do you wish to lose your license?'

Mosk, who was seated in an arm-chair, smiling and singing, with a very red face, was struck dumb by the chaplain's sudden entrance and sharp rebuke. Bell, flushed and angered, was also astonished to see Mr Cargrim, but hailed his arrival with joy as likely to have some moral influence on her riotous father. Personally she detested Cargrim, but she respected his cloth, and was glad to see him wield the thunders of his clerical position.

'That is right, Mr Cargrim!' she cried with flashing eyes. 'Tell him he ought to be ashamed of drinking and singing with mother so ill upstairs.'

'I don't mean t' do any 'arm,' said Mosk, rising sheepishly, for the shock of Cargrim's appearance sobered him a good deal. 'I wos jus' havin' a glass to celebrate a joyful day.'

'Cannot you take your glass without becoming intoxicated?' said Cargrim, in disgust. 'I tell you what, Mosk, if you go on in this way, I shall make it my business to warn Sir Harry Brace against you.'

'I told you how t'would be, father,' put in Bell, reproachfully.

'You onnatural child, goin' agin your parent,' growled Mr Mosk. 'Wasn't I drinkin' to your health, 'cause the old 'un at Heathcroft wos passin' to his long 'ome? Tell me that!'

'What do you mean, Mosk?' asked the chaplain, starting.

'Nothing, sir,' interposed Bell, hurriedly. 'Father don't know what he is sayin'.'

'Yes, I do,' contradicted her father, sulkily. 'Old Mr Leigh, th' pass'n of Heathcroft, is dying, and when he dies you'll live at Heathcroft with—'

'Father! father! hold your tongue!'

'With my son-in-law Gabriel!'

'Your—son-in-law,' gasped Cargrim, recoiling. 'Is—is your daughter the wife of young Mr Pendle?'

'No, I am not, Mr Cargrim,' cried Bell, nervously. 'It's father's nonsense.'

'It's Bible truth, savin' your presence,' said Mosk, striking the table. 'Young Mr Pendle is engaged to marry you, ain't he? and he's goin' to hev the livin' of Heathcroft, ain't he? and old Leigh's a-dyin' fast, ain't he?'

'Go on, father, you've done it now,' said Bell, resignedly, and sat down.

Cargrim was almost too surprised to speak. The rector of Heathcroft—dying; Gabriel engaged to marry this common woman. He looked from one to the other in amazement; at the triumphant Mosk, and the blushing girl.

'Is this true, Miss Mosk?' he asked doubtfully.

'Yes! I am engaged to marry Gabriel Pendle,' cried Bell, with a toss of her head. 'You can tell the whole town so if you like. Neither he nor I will contradict you.'

'It's as true as true!' growled Mosk. 'My daughter's going to be a lady.'

'I congratulate you both,' said Cargrim, gravely. 'This will be a surprise to the bishop,' and feeling himself unequal to the situation, he made his escape.

'Well, father,' said Bell, 'this is a pretty kettle of fish, this is!'

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE LIBRARY

CERTAINLY there was little enough to admire in Mr Cargrim's character, still he was not altogether a bad man. In common with his fellow-creatures he also had his good qualities, but these were somewhat rusty for want of use. As Mrs Rawdon Crawley, *née* Sharp, remarked, most people can be good on five thousand a year; and if Cargrim had been high-placed and wealthy he would no doubt have developed his better instincts for lack of reasons to make use of his worser. But being only a poor curate, he had a long ladder to climb, which he thought could be ascended more rapidly by kicking down all those who impeded his progress, and by holding on to the skirts of those who were a few rungs higher. Therefore he was not very nice in his distinction between good and evil, and did not mind by what means he succeeded, so long as he was successful. He knew very well that he was not a favourite with the bishop, and that Dr Pendle would not give him more of the Levitical loaves and fishes than he could help; but as the holder of the Beorminster See was the sole dispenser of these viands with whom Cargrim was acquainted, it behoved him at all risks to compel the bestowal of gifts which were not likely to be given of free-will. Therefore, Cargrim plotted, and planned, and schemed to learn the bishop's secret and set him under his thumb.

But with all the will in the world this schemer was not clever enough to deal with the evidence he had accumulated. The bishop had had an understanding with Jentham; he had attempted to secure his silence, as was proved by the torn-out butt of the cheque-book: he had — as Cargrim suspected — killed the blackmailer to bury his secret in the grave, and he had been warned by Mother Jael that she knew of his wicked act. This was the evidence, but Cargrim did not know how to place it

ship-shape, in order to prove to Bishop Pendle that he had him in his power. It needed a trained mind to grapple with these confused facts, to follow out clues, to arrange details, and Cargrim recognised that it was needful to hire a helper. With this idea he resolved to visit London and there engage the services of a private inquiry agent; and as there was no time to be lost, he decided to ask the bishop for leave of absence on that very night. There is nothing so excellent as prompt attention to business, even when it consists of the dirtiest kind.

Nevertheless, to allow his better nature some small opportunity of exercise, Cargrim determined to afford the bishop one chance of escape. The visit to The Derby Winner had given him at once a weapon and a piece of information. The rector of Heathcroft was dying, so in the nature of things it was probable that the living would soon be vacant. From various hints, Cargrim was aware that the bishop destined this snug post for his younger son. But Gabriel Pendle was engaged to marry Bell Mosk, and when the bishop was informed of that fact, Cargrim had little doubt but that he would refuse to consecrate his son to the living. Then, failing Gabriel, the chaplain hoped that Dr Pendle might give it to him, and if he did so, Mr Cargrim was quite willing to let bygones be bygones. He would not search out the bishop's secret—at all events for the present—although, if Dean Alder died, he might make a later use of his knowledge to get himself elected to the vacant post. However, the immediate business in hand was to secure Heathcroft Rectory at the expense of Gabriel; so Mr Cargrim walked rapidly to the palace, with the intention of informing the bishop without delay of the young man's disgraceful conduct. Only at the conclusion of the interview could he determine his future course. If, angered at Gabriel, the bishop gave him the living, he would let the bishop settle his account with his conscience, but if Dr Pendle refused, he would then go up to London and hire a bloodhound to follow the trail of Dr Pendle's crime even to his very doorstep. In thus giving his patron an alternative, Cargrim thought himself a very virtuous person indeed. Yet, so far as he knew, he might be compounding a felony; but that knowledge did not trouble him in the least.

With this pretty little scheme in his head, the chaplain entered the library in which Dr Pendle was usually to be found, and sure enough the bishop was there, sitting all alone and looking as wretched as a man could. His face was grey and drawn—he had aged so markedly since Mrs Pendle's garden-party that Mr Cargrim was quite shocked — and he started nervously when his chaplain glided into the room. A nerve-storm, consequent on his interview

with Mother Jael, had exhausted the bishop's vitality, and he seemed hardly able to lift his head. The utter prostration of the man would have appealed to anyone save Cargrim, but that astute young parson had an end to gain, and was not to be turned from it by any display of mental misery. He put his victim on the rack, and tortured him as delicately and scientifically as any Inquisition of the good old days when Mother Church, anticipating the saying of the French Revolution, said to the backsliders of her flock, 'Be my child, lest I kill thee.' So Cargrim, like a modern Torquemada, racked the soul instead of the body, and devoted himself very earnestly to this congenial talk.

'I beg your pardon, my lord,' said he, making a feint of retiring, 'I did not know that your lordship was engaged.'

'I am not engaged,' replied the bishop, seemingly glad to escape from his own sad thoughts; 'come in, come in. You have left Mrs Pansey's *hôtel* rather early.'

'But not so early as you, sir,' said the chaplain, taking a chair where he could command an uninterrupted view of the bishop's face. 'I fear you are not well, my lord.'

'No, Cargrim, I am not well. In spite of my desire to continue my duties, I am afraid that I shall be forced to take a holiday for my health's sake.'

'Your lordship cannot do better than join Mrs Pendle at Nauheim.'

'I was thinking of doing so,' said the bishop, glancing at a letter at his elbow, 'especially as Sir Harry Brace is coming back on business to Beormminster. I do not wish my wife to be alone in her present uncertain state of health. As to my own, I'm afraid no springs will cure it; my disease is of the mind, not of the body.'

'Ah!' sighed Cargrim, sagely, 'the very worst kind of disease. May I ask what you are troubled about in your mind?'

'About many things, Cargrim, many things. Amongst them the fact of this disgraceful murder. It is a reflection on the diocese that the criminal is not caught and punished.'

'Does your lordship wish the assassin to be captured?' asked the chaplain, in his softest tone, and with much apparent simplicity.

Dr Pendle raised his head and darted a keen look at his questioner. 'Of course I do,' he answered sharply, 'and I am much annoyed that our local police have not been clever enough to hunt him down. Have you heard whether any more evidence has been found?'

'None likely to indicate the assassin, my lord. But I believe that the police have gathered some information about the victim's past.'

The bishop's hand clenched itself so

tightly that the knuckles whitened. 'About Jentham!' he muttered in a low voice, and not looking at the chaplain; 'ah, ah, what about him?'

'It seems, my lord,' said Cargrim, watchful of his companion's face, 'that thirty years ago the man was a violinist in London, and his professional name was Amaru.'

'A violinist! Amaru!' repeated Dr Pendle, and looked so relieved that Cargrim saw he had not received the answer he expected. 'A professional name you say?'

'Yes, your lordship,' replied the chaplain, trying hard to conceal his disappointment. 'No doubt the man's real name was Jentham.'

'No doubt,' assented the bishop, indifferently, 'although I daresay so notorious a vagrant must have possessed at least half a dozen names.'

It was on the tip of Cargrim's tongue to ask by what name Jentham had been known to his superior, but restrained by the knowledge of his incapacity to follow up the question, he was wise enough not to put it. Also, as he wished to come to an understanding with the bishop on the subject of the Heathcroft living, he turned the conversation in that direction by remarking that Mr Leigh was reported as dying.

'So Gabriel informed me,' said Dr Pendle, with a nod. 'I am truly sorry to hear it. Mr Leigh has been rector of Heathcroft parish for many years.'

'For twenty-five years, your lordship; but latterly he has been rather lax in his rule. What is needed in Heathcroft is a young and earnest man with a capacity for organisation, one who by words and deeds may be able to move the sluggish souls of the parishioners, who can contrive and direct and guide.'

'You describe an ideal rector, Cargrim,' remarked Dr Pendle, rather dryly, 'a kind of bishop in embryo; but where is such a paragon to be found?'

The chaplain coloured and looked conscious. 'I do not describe myself as a paragon,' said he, in a low voice; 'nevertheless, should your lordship think fit to present me with the Heathcroft cure of souls, I should strive to approach in some degree the ideal I have described.'

The bishop was no stranger to Cargrim's ambition, as it was not the first time that the chaplain had hinted that he would make a good rector of Heathcroft, therefore he did not feel surprised at being approached so crudely on the subject. With a testy gesture he pushed back his chair and looked rather frowningly on the presumptuous parson. But Cargrim was too sure of his ability to deal with the bishop to be daunted by looks, and with his sleek head on one side and a suave smile on his pale lips, he waited for the thunders from the episcopal throne. However, the bishop was just as diplomatic as his

chaplain, and too wise to give way to the temper he felt at so downright a request, approached the matter in an outwardly mild spirit.

'Heathcroft is a large parish,' said his lordship, meditatively.

'And therefore needs a hard-working young rector,' replied Cargrim. 'I am, of course, aware of my own deficiencies, but these may be remedied by prayer and by a humble spirit.'

'Mr Cargrim,' said the bishop, with a smile, 'do you remember the rather heterodox story of the farmer's comment on prayer being offered up for rain? "What is the use of praying for rain," said he, "when the wind is in this quarter?" I am inclined,' added Dr Pendle, looking very intently at Cargrim, 'to agree with the farmer.'

'Does that mean that your lordship will not give me the living?'

'We will come to that later, Mr Cargrim. At present I mean that no prayers will remedy our deficiencies unless the desire to do so begins in our own breasts.'

'Will your lordship indicate the particular deficiencies I should remedy?' asked the chaplain, outwardly calm, but inwardly raging.

'I think, Mr Cargrim,' said the bishop, gently, 'that your ambition is apt to take precedence of your religious feelings, else you would hardly adopt so extreme a course as to ask me so bluntly for a living. If I deemed it advisable that you should be rector of Heathcroft, I should bestow it on you without the necessity of your asking me to give it to you; but to be plain with you, Mr Cargrim, I have other designs when the living becomes vacant.'

'In that case, we need say no more, your lordship.'

'Pardon me, you must permit me to say this much,' said Dr Pendle, in his most stately manner, 'that I desire you to continue in your present position until you have more experience in diocesan work. It is not every young man, Mr Cargrim, who has so excellent an opportunity of acquainting himself with the internal management of the Catholic Church. Your father was a dear friend of mine,' continued the bishop, with emotion, 'and in my younger days I owed him much. For his sake, and for your own, I wish to help you as much as I can, but you must permit me to be the best judge of when and how to advance your interests. These ambitions of yours, Michael, which I have observed on several occasions, are dangerous to your better qualities. A clergyman of our Church is a man, and—being a priest—something more than a man; therefore it behoves him to be humble and religious and intent upon his immediate work for the glory of God. Should he rise, it must be by such qualities that he attains a higher post in the Church; but should he remain all his days in a humble position, he can die content,

knowing he has thought not of himself but of his God. Believe me, my dear young friend, I speak from experience, and it is better for you to leave your future in my hands.'

These sentiments, being the antithesis to those of Cargrim, were of course extremely unpalatable to one of his nature. He knew that he was more ambitious than religious; but it was galling to think that Dr Pendle should have been clever enough to gauge his character so truly. His mask of humility and deference had been torn off, and he was better known to the bishop than was at all agreeable to his cunning nature. He saw that so far as the Heathcroft living was concerned, he would never obtain it as a free gift from Dr Pendle; therefore it only remained to adopt the worser course, and force the prelate to accede to his request. Having thus decided, Mr Cargrim, with great self-control, smoothed his face to a meek smile, and even displayed a little emotion in order to show the bishop how touched he was by the kindly speech which had crushed his ambition.

'I am quite content to leave my future in your hands,' he said, with all possible suavity, 'and indeed, my lord, I know that you are my best—my only friend. The deficiency to which you allude shall be conquered by me if possible, and I trust that shortly I shall merit your lordship's more unreserved approbation.'

'Why,' said the bishop, shaking him heartily by the hand, 'that is a very worthy speech, Michael, and I shall bear it in mind. We are still friends, I trust, in spite of what I consider it was my duty to say.'

'Certainly we are friends, sir; I am honoured by the interest you take in me. And now, my lord,' added Cargrim, with a sweet smile, 'may I prefer a little request which was in my mind when I came to see you?'

'Of course! of course, Michael; what is it?'

'I have some business to transact in London, my lord; and I should like, with your permission, to be absent from my duties for a few days.'

'With pleasure,' assented the bishop; 'go when you like, Cargrim. I am only too pleased that you should ask me for a holiday.'

'Many thanks, your lordship,' said Cargrim, rising. 'Then I shall leave the palace tomorrow morning, and will return towards the end of the week. As there is nothing of particular importance to attend to, I trust your lordship will be able to dispense with my services during my few days' absence without trouble to yourself.'

'Set your mind at rest, Cargrim; you can take your holiday.'

'I again thank your lordship. It only remains for me to say that if—as I have heard—your lordship intends to make Mr Gabriel rector of Heathcroft, I trust he will

be as earnest and devout there as he has been in Beorminster.'

'I have not yet decided how to fill up the vacancy,' said the bishop, coldly, 'and let me remind you, Mr Cargrim, that as yet the present rector of Heathcroft still holds the living.'

'I do but anticipate the inevitable, my lord,' said Cargrim, preparing to drive his sting into the bishop, 'and certainly, the sooner Mr Gabriel is advanced to the living, the better it will be for his matrimonial prospects.'

Dr Pendle stared. 'I don't understand you!' he said stiffly.

'What!' Mr Cargrim threw up his hands in astonishment. 'Has not Mr Gabriel informed your lordship of his engagement?'

'Engagement!' echoed the bishop, half rising, 'do you mean to tell me that Gabriel is engaged, and without my knowledge?'

'Oh, your lordship!—I thought you knew—most indiscreet of me,' murmured Cargrim, in pretended confusion.

'To whom is my son engaged?' asked the bishop, sharply.

'To—to—really, I feel most embarrassed,' said the chaplain. 'I should not have taken—'

'Answer at once, sir,' cried Dr Pendle, irritably. 'To whom is my son Gabriel engaged? I insist upon knowing.'

'In that case, I must tell your lordship that Mr Gabriel is engaged to marry Miss Bell Mosk!'

The bishop bounded out of his chair. 'Bell Mosk! the daughter of the landlord of The Derby Winner?'

'Yes, your lordship.'

'The—the—the—barmaid! My son!—oh, it is—it is impossible!'

'I had it from the lips of the young lady herself,' said Cargrim, delighted at the bishop's annoyance. 'Certainly Miss Mosk is hardly fitted to be the wife of a future rector—still, she is a handsome—'

'Stop, sir!' cried the bishop, imperiously, 'don't dare to couple my son's name with that of—of—a barmaid. I cannot—I will not—I dare not believe it!'

'Nevertheless, it is true!'

'Impossible! incredible! the boy must be mad!'

'He is in love, which is much the same thing,' said Cargrim, with more boldness than he usually displayed before Dr Pendle; 'but to assure yourself of its truth, let me suggest that your lordship should question Mr Gabriel yourself. I believe he is in the palace.'

'Thank you, Mr Cargrim,' said the bishop, recovering from his first surprise. 'I thank you for the information, but I am afraid you have been misled. My son would never choose a wife out of a bar.'

'It is to be hoped he will see the folly of

doing so, my lord,' replied the chaplain, backing towards the door, 'and now I shall take my leave, assuring your lordship that I should never have spoken of Mr Gabriel's engagement had I not believed that you were informed on the point.'

The bishop made no reply, but sank into a chair, looking the picture of misery. After a glance at him, Cargrim left the room, rubbing his hands. 'I think I have given you a very good Roland for your Oliver, my lord!' he murmured.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BISHOP ASSERTS HIMSELF

ON being left alone, the bishop sat motionless in his chair for some considerable time. The information conveyed by Cargrim struck at his pride, but in his heart he knew well that he had as little right to be proud as to resent the blow. Casting a look over the past, he saw that Dr Graham had been right in his reference to the Ring of Polycrates, for although he was outwardly still prosperous and high-placed, shame had come upon him, and evil was about to beset. From the moment of Jentharn's secret visit a blight had fallen on his fortunes, a curse had come upon his house, and in a thousand hidden ways he had been tortured, although for no fault of his own. There was his secret which he did not dare even to think of; there was the enforced absence of his wife and daughter, whom he had been compelled to send away; there was the hidden enmity of Cargrim, which he did not know how to baffle; and now there was the shame of Gabriel's engagement to a barmaid; of George's choice of a wife, who, if rumour could be believed, was the daughter of a scoundrel. With these ills heaped upon his head, the bishop did not know how he could ever raise it again.

Still, all these woes were locked up in his own breast, and to the world he was yet the popular, prosperous Bishop of Beorminster. This impression and position he was resolved to maintain at all costs; therefore, to put an end to his last trouble, he concluded to speak seriously to his sons on the subject of unequal marriages. A pressure of the electric button summoned the servant, who was instructed to request Captain Pendle and Mr Gabriel to see their father at once in the library. It would seem as though they almost expected the message, for in a few minutes they were both in the room; George, with his usual jaunty, confident air, but Gabriel with an anxious look. Yet neither of the young men guessed why the bishop had sent for them; least of all George, who never dreamed for a moment that his father would oppose his engagement with Mab Arden.

'Sit down, both of you,' said Dr Pendle, in grave tones, 'I have something serious to say,' and the bishop took up an imposing position on the hearthrug. The two sons looked at one another.

'There is no bad news from Nauheim, I hope, sir?' said George, quite ignorant of the meaning of this exordium.

'No. Lucy's last letter about your mother was very cheerful indeed. I wish to speak seriously to both of you. As you are the elder, George, I shall begin with you; Gabriel, I shall reason with later.'

'Reason with me,' wondered the curate. 'Have I been doing anything which requires me to be reasoned with?' and he gave a half smile, never thinking how soon his jest would be turned into bitter earnest.

'I think a word in season will do you no harm,' answered his father, austere, 'but I shall address myself to George first.'

'I am all attention, sir,' said the captain, rather weary of this solemnity. 'What have I done?'

'You have concealed from me the fact of your engagement to Miss Arden.'

'Oh!' cried George, smiling, 'so Miss Whichello has been speaking!'

'Yes, she spoke to me to-day, and told me that you had formally engaged yourself to her niece without my knowledge or sanction. May I inquire your reason for so singular a course?'

'Is it singular, sir?' asked George, in a half-joking tone. 'I always understood that it was first necessary to obtain the lady's consent before making the matter public. I asked Mab to be my wife when I last visited Beorminster, and I intended to tell you of it this time, but I find that Miss Whichello has saved me the trouble. However, now that you know the truth, sir,' said Captain Pendle, with his sunny smile, 'may I ask for your approval and blessing?'

'You may ask,' said the bishop, coldly, 'but you shall have neither.'

'Father!' The answer was so unexpected that George jumped up from his chair with a cry of surprise, and even Gabriel, who was in the secret of his brother's love for Mab, looked astonished and pained.

'I do not approve of the engagement,' went on the bishop, imperturbably.

'You—do—not—approve—of—Mab!' said Captain Pendle, slowly, and his face became pale with anger.

'I said nothing about the lady,' corrected the bishop, haughtily; 'you will be pleased, sir, to take my words as I speak them. I do not approve of the engagement.'

'On what grounds?' asked George, quietly enough.

'I know nothing about Miss Arden's parents.'

'She is the daughter of Miss Whichello's sister.'

'I am aware of that, but what about her father?'

'Her father!' repeated George, rather perplexed. 'I never inquired about her father; I do not know anything about him.'

'Indeed!' said the bishop, 'it is just as well that you do not.'

Captain Pendle looked disturbed. 'Is there anything wrong with him?' he asked nervously. 'I thought he was dead and buried ages ago.'

'I believe he is dead; but from all accounts he was a scoundrel.'

'From whose account, bishop?'

'Mrs Pansey's for one.'

'Father!' cried Gabriel, 'surely you know that Mrs Pansey's gossip is most unreliable.'

'Not in this instance,' replied the bishop, promptly. 'Mrs Pansey told me some twenty-six years ago, when Miss Whichello brought her niece to this city, that the child's father was little better than a gaol-bird.'

'Did she know him?' asked George, sharply.

'That I cannot say, but she assured me that she spoke the truth. I paid no attention to her talk, nor did I question Miss Whichello on the subject. In those days it had no interest for me, but now that I find my son desires to marry the girl, I must refuse my consent until I learn all about her birth and parentage.'

'Miss Whichello will tell us about that!' said George, hopefully.

'Let us trust that Miss Whichello dare tell us.'

'Dare, sir!' cried Captain Pendle, gnawing his moustache.

'I used the word advisedly, George. If what Mrs Pansey asserts is true, Miss Whichello will feel a natural reluctance to confess the truth about Miss Arden's father.'

'Admitting as much,' urged Gabriel, seeing that George kept silent, 'surely you will not visit the sins of the father on the innocent child?'

'It is scriptural law, my son.'

'It is not the law of Christ,' replied the curate.

'Law or no law!' said Captain Pendle, determinedly, 'I shall not give Mab up. Her father may have been a Nero for all I care. I marry his daughter all the same; she is a good, pure, sweet woman.'

'I admit that she is all that,' said the bishop, 'and I do not want you to give her up without due inquiry into the matter of which I speak. But it is my desire that you should return to your regiment until the affair can be sifted.'

'Who should sift it but I?' inquired George, hotly.

'If you place it in my hands all will—I

trust—be well, my son. I shall see Miss Whichello and Mrs Pansey and learn the truth.'

'And if the truth be as cruel as you suspect?'

'In that case,' said the bishop, slowly, 'I shall consider the matter; you must not think that I wish you to break off your engagement altogether, George, but I desire you to suspend it, so to speak. For the reasons I have stated, I disapprove of your marrying Miss Arden, but it may be that, should I be informed fully about her father, I may change my mind. In the meantime, I wish you to rejoin your regiment and remain with it until I send for you.'

'And if I refuse?'

'In that case,' said the bishop, sternly, 'I shall refuse my consent altogether. Should you refuse to acknowledge my authority I shall treat you as a stranger. But I have been a good father to you, George, and I trust that you will see fit to obey me.'

'I am not a child,' said Captain Pendle, sullenly.

'You are a man of the world,' replied his father, skilfully, 'and as such must see that I am speaking for your own good. I ask merely for delay, so that the truth may be known before you engage yourself irrevocably to this young lady.'

'I look upon my engagement as irrevocable! I have asked Mab to be my wife, I have given her a ring, I have won her heart; I should be a mean hound,' cried George, lashing himself into a rage, 'if I gave her up for the lying gossip of an old she-devil like Mrs Pansey.'

'Your language is not decorous, sir.'

'I—I beg your pardon, father, but don't be too hard on me.'

'Your own good sense should tell you that I am not hard on you.'

'Indeed,' put in Gabriel, 'I think that my father has reason on his side, George.'

'You are not in love,' growled the captain, unconvinced.

A pale smile flitted over Gabriel's lips, not unnoticed by the bishop, but as he purposed speaking to him later, he made no remark on it at the moment.

'What do you wish me to do, sir?' asked George, after a pause.

'I have told you,' rejoined the bishop, mildly. 'I desire you to rejoin your regiment and not come back to Beorminster until I send for you.'

'Do you object to my seeing Mab before I go?'

'By no means; see both Miss Arden and Miss Whichello if you like, and tell them both that it is by my desire you go away.'

'Well, sir,' said Captain Pendle, slowly, 'I am willing to obey you and return to my work, but I refuse to give up Mab,' and not trusting himself to speak further, lest he should lose his temper altogether, he abruptly left the room.

The bishop saw him retire with a sigh and shook his head. Immediately afterwards he addressed himself to Gabriel, who, with some apprehension, was waiting for him to speak.

'Gabriel,' said Dr Pendle, picking up a letter, 'Harry has written to me from Nauheim, saying that he is compelled to return home on business. As I do not wish your mother and Lucy to be alone, it is my desire that you should join them—at once!'

The curate was rather amazed at the peremptory tone of this speech, but hastened to assure his father that he was quite willing to go. The reason given for the journey seemed to him a sufficient one, and he had no suspicion that his father's real motive was to separate him from Bell. The bishop saw that this was the case, and forthwith came to the principal point of the interview.

'Do you know why I wish you to go abroad?' he asked sharply.

'To join my mother and Lucy—you told me so.'

'That is one reason, Gabriel; but there is another and more important one.'

A remembrance of his secret engagement turned the curate's face crimson; but he faltered out that he did not understand what his father meant.

'I think you understand well enough,' said Dr Pendle, sternly. 'I allude to your disgraceful conduct in connection with that woman at The Derby Winner.'

'If you allude to my engagement to Miss Mosk, sir,' cried Gabriel, with spirit, 'there is no need to use the word disgraceful. My conduct towards that young lady has been honourable throughout.'

'And what about your conduct towards your father?' asked the bi-hop.

Gabriel hung his head. 'I intended to tell you,' he stammered, 'when—'

'When you could summon up courage to do so,' interrupted Dr Pendle, in cutting tones. 'Unfortunately, your candour was not equal to your capability for deception, so I was obliged to learn the truth from a stranger.'

'Cargrim!' cried Gabriel, his instinct telling him the name of his betrayer.

'Yes, from Mr Cargrim. He heard the truth from the lips of this girl herself. She informed him that she was engaged to marry you—you, my son.'

'It is true!' said Gabriel, in a low voice. 'I wish to make her my wife.'

'Make her your wife!' cried Dr Pendle, angrily; 'this common girl—this—this barmaid—this—'

'I shall not listen to Bell being called names even by you, father,' said Gabriel, proudly. 'She is a good girl, a respectable girl—a beautiful girl!'

'And a barmaid,' said the bishop, dryly. 'I congratulate you on the daughter-in-law you have selected for your mother!'

Gabriel winced. Much as he loved Bell,

the idea of her being in the society of his delicate, refined mother was not a pleasant one. He could not conceal from himself that although the jewel he wished to pick out of the gutter might shine brilliantly there, it might not glitter so much when translated to a higher sphere and placed beside more polished gems. Therefore, he could find no answer to his father's speech, and wisely kept silence.

'Certainly, my sons are a comfort to me!' continued the bishop, sarcastically. 'I have brought them up in what I judged to be a wise and judicious manner, but it seems I am mistaken, since the first use they make of their training is to deceive the father who has never deceived them.'

'I admit that I have behaved badly, father.'

'No one can deny that, sir. The question is, do you intend to continue behaving badly?'

'I love Bell dearly—very dearly!'

The bishop groaned and sat down helplessly in his chair. 'It is incredible,' he said. 'How can you, with your refined tastes and up-bringing, love this—this? Well, I shall not call her names. No doubt Miss Mosk is well enough in her way, but she is not a proper wife for my son.'

'Our hearts are not always under control, father.'

'They should be, Gabriel. The head should always guide the heart; that is only common sense. Besides, you are too young to know your own mind. This girl is handsome and scheming, and has infatuated you in your innocence. I should be a bad father to you if I did not rescue you from her wiles. To do so, it is my intention that you shall go abroad for a time.'

'I am willing to go abroad, father, but I shall never, never forget Bell!'

'You speak with all the confidence of a young man in love for the first time, Gabriel. I am glad that you are still sufficiently obedient to obey me. Of course, you know that I cannot consent to your making this girl your wife.'

'I thought that you might be angry,' faltered Gabriel.

'I am more hurt than angry,' replied the bishop. 'Have you given this young woman a promise of marriage?'

'Yes, father; I gave her an engagement ring.'

'I congratulate you, sir, on your methodical behaviour. However, it is no use arguing with one so infatuated as you are. All I can do is to test your affection by parting you from Miss Mosk. When you return from Nauheim we shall speak further on the subject.'

'When do you wish me to go, father?' asked Gabriel, rising submissively.

'To-morrow,' said the bishop, coldly. 'You can leave me now.'

'I am sorry—'

'Sorry!' cried Dr Pendle, with a frown.

'What is the use of words without deeds? Both you and George have given me a sore heart this day. I thought that I could trust my sons; I find that I cannot. If— But it is useless to talk further. I shall see what absence can do in both cases. Now leave me, if you please.'

The bishop turned to his desk and busied himself with some papers, while Gabriel, after a moment's hesitation, left the room with a deep sigh. Dr Pendle, finding himself alone, leaned back in his chair and groaned aloud.

'I have averted the danger for the time being,' he said sadly, 'but the future—ah. me! what of the future?'

CHAPTER XXV

MR BALTIC, MISSIONARY

ABOUT this time there appeared in Beominster an elderly, weather-beaten man, with a persuasive tongue and the quick, alert eye of a fowl. He looked like a sailor, and as such was an object of curiosity to inland folk; but he called himself a missionary, saying that he had laboured these many years in the Lord's vineyard of the South Seas, and had returned to England for a sight of white faces and a smack of civilisation. This hybrid individual was named Ben Baltic, and had the hoarse voice of a mariner accustomed to out-roar storms, but his conversation was free from nautical oaths, and remarkably entertaining by reason of his adventurous life. He could not be said to be obtrusively religious, yet he gave everyone the impression of being a good and earnest worker, and one who practised what he preached, for he neither smoked nor gambled nor drank strong waters. Yet there was nothing Pharisaic about his speech or bearing.

In a pilot suit of rough blue cloth, with a red bandanna handkerchief and a wide-brimmed hat of Panama straw, Mr Baltic took up his residence at The Derby Winner, and, rolling about Beominster in the true style of Jack ashore, speedily made friends with people high and low. The low he became acquainted with on his own account, as a word and a smile in his good-humoured way was sufficient to establish at least a temporary friendship; but he owed his familiarity with the 'high' to the good offices of Mr Cargrim. That gentleman returned from his holiday with much apparent satisfaction, and declared himself greatly benefited by the change. Shortly after his resumption of his duties, he received a visit from Baltic the missionary, who presented him with a letter of introduction from a prominent London vicar. From this epistle the chaplain

learned that Baltic was a rough diamond with a gift of untutored eloquence, that he desired to rest for a week or two in Beorminster, and that any little attention shown to him would be grateful to the writer. It said much for Mr Cargrim's goodwill and charity that, on learning all this, he at once opened his arms and heart to the missionary-mariner. He declared his willingness to make Baltic's stay as pleasant as he could, but was shocked to learn that the new-comer had taken up his abode at The Derby Winner. His feelings extended even so far as remonstrance.

'For,' said Cargrim, shaking his head, 'I assure you, Mr Baltic, that the place is anything but respectable.'

'And for such reason I stay there, sir. If you want to do good begin with the worst; that's my motto. The Christian heathen can't be worse than the Pagan heathen, I take it, Mr Cargrim.'

'I don't know so much about that,' sighed Cargrim. 'Refined vice is always the most terrible. Witness the iniquities of Babylon and Rome.'

'There ain't much refinement about that blackguard public,' answered the missionary, without the shadow of a smile, 'and if I can stop all the swearing and drinking and shuffling of the devil's picture-books which goes on there, I'll be busy at the Lord's work, I reckon.'

From this position Baltic refused to budge, so in the end Cargrim left off trying to dissuade him, and the conversation became of a more confidential character. Evidently the man's qualities were not over-praised in the letter of introduction, for, on meeting him once or twice and knowing him better, Cargrim found occasion to present him to the bishop. Baltic's descriptions of his South Sea labours fascinated Dr Pendle by their colour and wildness, and he suggested that the missionary should deliver a discourse of the same quality to the public. A hall was hired; the lecture was advertised as being under the patronage of the bishop, and so many tickets were sold that the building was crowded with the best Beorminster society, led by Mrs Pansey. The missionary, after introducing himself as a plain and unlettered man, launched out into a wonderfully vigorous and picturesque description of those Islands of Paradise which bloom like gardens amid the blue waters of the Pacific Ocean. He described the fecundity and luxuriance of Nature, drew word-portraits of the mild, brown-skinned Polynesians, wept over their enthralment by a debased system of idolatry, and painted the blessings which would befall them when converted to the gentle religion of Christ. Baltic had the gift of enchanting his hearers, and the audience hung upon his speech with breathless attention. The

natural genius of the man poured forth in burning words and eloquent apostrophes. The subject was picturesque, the language was inspiring, the man a born orator, and, when the audience dispersed, everyone, from the bishop downward, agreed that Beorminster was entertaining an untutored Demosthenes. Dr Pendle sighed as he thought of the many dull sermons he had been compelled to endure, and wondered why the majority of his educated clergy should fall so far behind the untaught, unconsecrated, rough-mannered missionary.

From the time of that lecture, Ben Baltic, for all his lowly birth and uncouth ways, became the lion of Beorminster. He was invited by Mrs Pansey to afternoon tea; he was in request at garden-parties; he gave lectures in surrounding parishes, and, on the whole, created an undeniable sensation in the sober cathedral city. Baltic observed much and said little; his eyes were alert, his tongue was discreet, and, even when borne on the highest tide of popularity, he lost none of his modesty and good-humour. He still continued to dwell at The Derby Winner, where his influence was salutary, for the customers there drank less and swore less when he was known to be present. Certainly, such reformation did not please Mr Mosk over-much, and he frequently grumbled that it was hard a man should have his trade spoilt by a psalm-singing missionary, but a wholesome fear of Cargrim's threat to inform Sir Harry checked him from asking Baltic to leave. Moreover, the man was greatly liked by Mrs Mosk on account of his religious spirit, and approved of by Bell from the order he kept in the hotel. Therefore Mosk, being in the minority, could only stand on one side and grumble, which he did with true English zeal.

It was while Baltic was thus exciting Beorminster that Sir Harry Brace came back. Gabriel, in pursuance of his father's wish, had gone over to Nauheim after a short interview with Bell, in which he had told her of his father's opposition to the match. Bell was cast down, but did not despair, as she thought that the bishop might soften towards Gabriel during his absence; so she sent him abroad with a promise that she would remain true to him until he returned. When the curate joined Mrs Pendle and Lucy, Sir Harry, with much regret, had to relinquish his pre-nuptial honeymoon, and returned to Beorminster in the lowest of spirits. The bishop did not tell him about Gabriel's infatuation for Bell, nor did he explain that George had engaged himself secretly to Mab Arden, so Harry was quite in the dark as regards the domestic dissensions, and, ascribing the bishop's gloom to the absence of his family, visited him frequently in order to cheer him up. But the dark hour was on Bishop Pendle, and notwithstanding the

narping of this David, the evil spirit would not depart.

'What is the matter with the bishop?' asked Harry one evening of Cargrim. 'He is as glum as an owl.'

'I do not know what ails him,' replied the chaplain, who, for reasons of his own, was resolved to hold his tongue, 'unless it is that he has been working too hard of late.'

'It isn't that, Cargrim; all the years I have known him he has never been so down-in-the-mouth before. I fancy he has something on his mind.'

'If you think so, Sir Harry, why not ask him?'

Brace shook his head. 'That would never do!' he answered. 'The bishop doesn't like to be asked questions. I wish I could see him livelier; is there nothing you can suggest to cheer him up?'

'Baltic might deliver another lecture on the South Seas!' said Cargrim, blandly. 'His lordship was pleased with the last one.'

'Baltic!' repeated Sir Harry, giving a meditative twist to his black moustache, 'that missionary fellow. I was going to ask you something about him!'

Cargrim looked surprised and slightly nervous. 'Beyond that he is a missionary, and is down here for his health's sake, I know nothing about him,' he said hastily.

'You introduced him to the bishop, didn't you?'

'Yes. He brought a letter of introduction to me from the Vicar of St Ann's in Kensington, but his biography was not given me.'

'He's been in the South Seas, hasn't he?'

'I believe that his labours lay amongst the natives of the islands!'

'Well, I know him!' said Brace, with a nod.

'You know him!' repeated the chaplain, anxiously.

'Yes. Met him five years ago in Samoa; he was more of a beach-comber than a missionary in those days. Ben Baltic he calls himself, doesn't he? I thought so! It's the same man.'

'He is a very worthy person, Sir Harry!'

'So you say. I suppose people improve when they get older, but he wasn't a saint when I knew him. He racketed about a good deal. Humph! perhaps he repented when I saved his life.'

'Did you save his life?'

'Well, yes. Baltic was raising Cain in some drunken row along with a set of Kanakas, and one of 'em got him under to slip a knife into him. I caught the nigger a clip on the jaw and sent him flying. There wasn't much fight in old Ben when I straightened him out after that. So he's turned devil-dodger. I must have a look at him in his new capacity.'

'Whatever he has been,' said Cargrim, who appeared uneasy during the recital of this little

story, 'I am sure that he has repented of his past errors and is now quite sincere in his religious convictions.'

'I'll judge of that for myself, if you don't mind,' drawled the baronet, with a twinkle in his dark eyes, and nodding to Cargrim, he strolled off, leaving that gentleman very uncomfortable. Sir Harry saw that he was so, and wondered why any story affecting Baltic should render the chaplain uneasy. He received an explanation some days later from the missionary himself.

Brace possessed a handsome family seat, embosomed in a leafy park, some five miles from the city. At present it was undergoing alterations and repairs, so that it might be a more perfect residence when the future Lady Brace crossed its threshold as a bride. Consequently the greater part of the house was in confusion, and given over to painters, plasterers, and such-like upsetting people. Harry, however, had decided to live in his own particular rooms, so that he might see that everything was carried out in accordance with Lucy's wish, and the wing he inhabited was in fairly good order. Still, Sir Harry being a bachelor, and extremely untidy, his den, as he called it, was in a state of pleasing muddle, which oftentimes drew forth rebukes from Lucy. She was resolved to train her Harry into better ways when she had the wifely right to correct him, but, as she frequently remarked, it would be the thirteenth labour of Hercules to cleanse this modern Augean stable.

Harry himself, with male obstinacy, always asserted that the room was tidy enough, and that he hated to live in a prim apartment. He said that he could lay his hand on anything he wanted, and that the seeming confusion was perfect order to him. Lucy gave up arguing on these grounds, but privately determined that when the honeymoon was over she would have a grand 'clarin up' time like Dinah in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In the meanwhile, Harry continued to dwell amongst his confused household gods, like Marius amid the ruins of Carthage.

And after all, the 'den,' if untidy, was a very pleasant apartment, decorated extensively with evidences of Harry's athletic tastes. There were boxing-gloves, fencing-foils, dumb-bells, and other aids to muscular exertion; silver cups won at college sports were ranged on the mantelpiece; on one wall hung a selection of savage weapons which Harry had brought from Africa and the South Seas; on the other, a hunting trophy of whip, spurs, cap and fox's brush was arranged; and pictures of celebrated horses and famous jockeys were placed here, there and everywhere. The writing-table, pushed up close to the window, was littered with papers, and letters and plans, and before this Harry was seated one morning writing a letter to Lucy, when the servant informed

him that Mr Baltic was waiting without. Harry gave orders for his instant admittance, as he was curious to see again the sinner turned saint, and anxious to learn what tide from the far South Seas had stranded him in respectable, unromantic Beorminster.

When the visitor entered, with his burly figure and bright, observant eyes, Harry gave him a friendly nod, but knowing more about Baltic than the rest of Beorminster, did not offer him his hand. From his height of six feet, he looked down on the thick-set little missionary, and telling him to be seated, made him welcome in a sufficiently genial fashion, nevertheless with a certain reserve. He was not quite certain if Baltic's conversion was genuine, and if he found proof of hypocrisy, was prepared to fall foul of him forthwith. Sir Harry was not particularly religious, but he was honest, and hated cant with all his soul.

'Well, Ben!' said he, looking sharply at his visitor's solemn red face, 'who would have thought of seeing you in these latitudes?'

'We never know what is before us, sir,' replied Baltic, in his deep, rough voice. 'It was no more in my mind that I should meet you under your own fig-tree than it was that I should receive a call through you!'

'Receive a call, man! What do you mean?' asked Harry, negligently. 'By the way, will you have a cigar?'

'No thank you, sir. I don't smoke now.'

'A whisky and soda, then?'

'I have given up strong waters, sir.'

'Here is repentance indeed!' observed the baronet, with some sarcasm. 'You have changed since the Samoan days, Baltic!'

'Thanks be to Christ, sir, I have,' said the man, reverently, 'and my call was through you, sir. When you saved my life I resolved to lead a new one, and I sought out Mr Eva, the missionary, who gave me hope of being a better man. I listened to his preaching, Sir Harry, I read the Gospels, I wrestled with my sinful self, and after a long fight I was made strong. My doubts were set at rest, my sins were washed in the Blood of the Lamb, and since He took me into His Holy keeping, I have striven to be worthy of His great love.'

Baltic spoke so simply, and with such nobility, that Brace could not but believe that he was in earnest. There was no spurious affection, no cant about the man; his words were grave, his manner was earnest, and his speech came from the fulness of his heart. If there had been a false note, a false look, Harry would have detected both, and great would have been his disgust and wrath. But the dignity of the speech, the simplicity of the description, impressed him with a belief that Baltic was speaking truly. The man was a rough sailor, and therefore not cunning enough to feign an emotion

he did not feel, so, almost against his will, Brace was obliged to believe that he saw before him a Saul converted into a Paul. The change of Pagan Ben into Christian Baltic was little else than miraculous.

'And are you now a missionary?' said Brace, after a reflective pause.

'No, Sir Harry,' answered the man, calmly, and with dignity, 'I am a private inquiry agent!'

CHAPTER XXVI

THE AMAZEMENT OF SIR HARRY BRACE

'A PRIVATE inquiry agent!' Sir Harry jumped up from his chair with an angry look, and a sharp ejaculation, neither of which disturbed his visitor. With his red bandanna handkerchief spread on his knees, and his straw hat resting on the handkerchief, Baltic looked at his flushed host calmly and solemnly without moving a muscle, or even winking an eye. Brace did not know whether to treat the ex-sailor as a madman or as an impudent impostor. The situation was almost embarrassing.

'What do you mean, sir,' he asked angrily, 'by coming to me with a cock-and-bull story about your conversion, and then telling me that you are a private inquiry agent, which is little less than a spy?'

'Is it impossible for such a one to be a Christian, Sir Harry?'

'I should think so. One who earns his living by sneaking can scarcely act up to the ethics of the Gospels.'

'I don't earn my living by sneaking,' replied Baltic, coolly. 'If I did, I shouldn't explain my business to you as I have done—as I am doing. My work is honourable enough, sir, for I am ranged against evildoers, and it is my duty to bring their works to naught. There is no need for me to defend my profession to anyone but you, Sir Harry, as no one but yourself, and perhaps two other people, know what I really am.'

'They shall know it,' spoke Sir Harry, hastily. 'All Beorminster shall know of it. We don't care for wolves in sheep's clothing here.'

'Better be sure that I am a wolf before you talk rashly,' said Baltic, in no wise disturbed. 'I came here to speak to you openly, because you saved my life, and that debt I wish to square. And let me tell you, sir, that it isn't Christianity, or even justice, to hear one side of the question and not the other.'

Harry looked puzzled. 'You are an enigma to me, Baltic.'

'I am here to explain myself, sir. As your hand dashed aside the knife of that Kanaka you have a claim on my confidence. You'll

be a sad man and a glad man when you hear my story, sir.'

Harry resumed his seat, shrugged his shoulders, and took a leisurely look at his self-possessed visitor. 'Sad and glad are contradictory terms, my friend,' said he, carelessly. 'I would rather you explained riddles than propounded them.'

'Sir Harry! Sir Harry! it is the riddle of man's life upon this earth that I am trying to explain.'

'You have set yourself a hard task, Baltic, for so far as I can see, there is no reading of that riddle.'

'Save by the light of the Gospel, sir, which makes all things plain.'

'Baltic,' said Brace, bluntly, 'there is that about you which would make me sorry to find you a Pharisee or a hypocrite. Therefore, if you please, we will stop religion and allegory, and come to plain matter-of-fact. When I knew you in Samoa, you were a sailor without a ship.'

'Add a castaway and a child of the devil, sir, and you will describe me as I was then, burst out Baltic, in his deep voice. 'Hear me, Sir Harry, and gauge me as I should be gauged. I was, as you know, a drunken, godless, swearing dog, in the grip of Satan as fuel for hell; but when you saved my worthless life I saw that it behoved me, as it does all men, to repent. I sought out a missionary, who heard my story and set my feet in the right path. I listened to his preaching, I read the Good Book, and so learned how I could be saved. The missionary made me his fellow-labourer in the islands, and I strove to bring the poor heathen to the foot of the cross. For three years I laboured there, until it was borne in upon me that I was called upon by the Spirit to labour in the greater vineyard of London. Therefore, I came to England and looked round to see what task was fittest for my hand. On every side I saw evil prosper. The wicked, as I noted, flourished like a green bay tree; so, to bring them to repentance and punishment, I became a private inquiry agent.'

'Humph! that is a novel kind of missionary enterprise, Baltic.'

'It is a righteous one, Sir Harry. I search out iniquities; I snare the wicked man in his own nets; I make void the devices of his evil heart. If I cannot prevent crimes, I can at least punish them by bringing their doers within the grip of the law. Then when punished by man, they repent and turn to God, and thereby are saved through their own lusts.'

'Not in many cases, I am afraid. So you regard yourself as a kind of scourge for the wicked?'

'Yes! When I state that I am a missionary, I regard myself as one who works in a new way.'

'A kind of *fin-de-siècle* apostle, in fact,'

said Brace, dryly. 'But isn't the term "missionary" rather a misnomer?'

'No!' replied Baltic, earnestly. 'I do my work in a different way, that is all. I baffle the wicked, and by showing them the futility of sin, induce them to lead a new life. I make them fall, only to aid them to rise; for when all is lost, their hearts soften.'

'You give them a kind of Hobson's choice, I see,' commented Sir Harry, who was puzzled by the man's conception of his work, but saw that he spoke in all seriousness. 'Well, Baltic, it is a queer way of calling sinners to repentance, and I cannot understand it myself.'

'My method of conversion is certainly open to misconstruction, sir. That is why I term myself rather a missionary than a private inquiry agent.'

'I see; you don't wish to scare your promising flock of criminals. Does anyone here know that you are a private inquiry agent?'

'Mr Cargrim does,' said the ex-sailor, calmly, 'and one other.'

Harry leaned forward with an incredulous look. 'Cargrim knows,' he said in utter amazement. 'I should think he would be the last man to approve of your ideas, with his narrow views and clerical red-tapeism.'

'Perhaps so, sir; but in this case my views happen to fall in with his own. I came to see you, Sir Harry, in order to ease my mind on that point.'

'In order to ease your mind!' repeated Brace, with a keen look. 'Go on.'

'Sir Harry, I speak to you in confidence about Mr Cargrim. I do not like that man, sir.'

'You belong to the majority, then, Baltic. Few people like Cargrim, or trust him. But what is he to you?'

'My employer. Yes, sir, you may well look astonished. Mr Cargrim asked me down to Beaminster for a certain purpose.'

'Connected with his self-aggrandisement, no doubt.'

'That I cannot tell you, Sir Harry, as Mr Cargrim has not told me his motive for engaging me in my business capacity. All I know is that he wishes me to discover who killed a man called Jentham.'

'The deuce!' Harry jumped up with an excited look. 'Why is he taking the trouble to do that?'

'I can't say, sir, unless it is that he dislikes Bishop Pendle!'

'Dislikes Bishop Pendle, man! And what has all this to do with the murder of Jentham?'

'Sir,' said Baltic, with a cautious glance around, and sinking his voice to a whisper, 'Mr Cargrim suspects Dr Pendle of the crime.'

'What!!!' Sir Harry turned the colour of chalk, and sprang back until he almost

touched the wall. 'You hound!' said he, speaking with unnatural calmness, 'do you dare to sit there and tell me that you have come here to watch the bishop?'

'Yes, Sir Harry,' was Baltic's stolid rejoinder, 'and calling me names won't do away with the fact.'

'Does Cargrim believe that the bishop killed this man?'

'Yes, sir, he does, and wishes me to bring the crime home to him.'

'Curse you!' roared Harry, striding across the room, and towering over the unmoved Baltic. 'I'll wring your neck, sir, if you dare to hint at such a thing.'

'I am merely stating facts, Sir Harry—facts,' he added pointedly, 'which I wish you to know.'

'For what purpose?'

'That you may assist me.'

'To hunt down the bishop, I suppose,' said Sir Harry, quivering with rage.

'No, sir, to save the bishop from Mr Cargrim.'

'Then you do not believe that the bishop is guilty.'

'Sir,' said Baltic, with dignity, 'in London and in Beorminster I have collected certain evidence which, on the face of it, incriminates the bishop. But since knowing Dr Pendle I have been observant of his looks and demeanour, and—after much thought—I have come to the conclusion that he is innocent of this crime which Mr Cargrim lays to his charge. It is because of this belief that I tell you my mind and seek your assistance. We must work together, sir, and discover the real criminal so as to baffle Mr Cargrim.'

'Cargrim, Cargrim,' repeated Brace, angrily, 'he is a bad lot.'

'That is what I say, Sir Harry. He is one who spreads a snare, and I wish him to be taken in it himself.'

'Yet Cargrim is your employer, and pays you,' sneered Sir Harry.

'You are wrong,' replied Baltic, quietly. 'I do not take payment for my work.'

'How do you live then? You were not independent when I knew you.'

'That is true, Sir Harry, but when I arrived in England I found that my father was dead, and had left me sufficient to live upon. Therefore I take no fee for my work, but labour to punish the wicked, for religion's sake.'

Brace muttered something about the heat, and wiped his forehead as he resumed his seat. The peculiar views held by Baltic perplexed him greatly, and he could not reconcile the man's desire to capture criminals with his belief in a religion, the keynote of which is, 'God is love.' Evidently Baltic wished to convert sinners by playing on their fears rather than by appealing to their religious feelings, although it was certainly true that those rascals with whom he had to deal

probably had no elements of belief whatsoever in their seared minds.

But be this as it may, Baltic's mission was both novel and strange, and might in some degree prove successful from its very originality. Torquemada burned bodies to save souls, but this man exposed vices, so that those who committed them, being banned by the law, and made outcasts from civilisation, should find no friend but the Deity. Harry was not clever enough to understand the ethics of this conception, therefore he abandoned any attempt to do so, and treating Baltic purely as an ordinary detective, addressed himself to the task of arriving at the evidence which was said to inculpate Dr Pendle in the murder of Jenthal. The ex-sailor accepted the common ground of argument, and in his turn abandoned theology for the business of everyday life. Common sense was needed to expose and abase and overturn those criminals whose talents enabled them to conceal their wickedness; proselytism could follow in due course. There was the germ of a new sect in Baltic's conception of Christianity as a terrorising religion.

'Let me hear your evidence against the bishop,' said Sir Harry, calm and business-like.

Baltic complied with this request and gave the outlines of the case in barren detail. 'Sir,' said he, gravely, 'some weeks ago, while there was a reception at the palace, this man Jenthal called to see the bishop and evidently attempted to blackmail him on account of some secret. Afterwards Jenthal, not being able to pay for his board and lodging at The Derby Winner, promised Mosk, the landlord, that he would discharge his bill shortly, as he expected the next week to receive much money. From whom he did not say, but while drunk he boasted that Southberry Heath was Tom Tiddler's ground, on which he could pick up gold and silver. In the meantime, Bishop Pendle went up to London and drew out of the Ophir Bank a sum of two hundred pounds, in twenty ten-pound notes. With this money he returned to Beorminster and kept an appointment, on the common, with Jenthal, when returning on Sunday night from Southberry. Whether he paid him the blackmail I cannot say; whether he killed the man no one can declare honestly; but it is undoubtedly true that, the next morning, Jenthal, whom the bishop regarded as his enemy, was found dead. These, sir, are the bare facts of the case, and, as you can see, they certainly appear to inculpate Dr Pendle in the crime.'

This calm and pitiless statement chilled Sir Harry's blood. Although he could not bring himself to believe that the bishop was guilty, yet he saw plainly enough that the evidence tended, almost beyond all doubt, to incriminate the prelate. Yet there might

be flaws even in so complete an indictment, and Harry, seeking for them, began eagerly to question Baltic.

'Who told you all this?' he demanded with some apprehension.

'Mr Cargrim told me some parts, and I found out others for myself, sir.'

'Does Cargrim know the nature of Dr Pendle's secret?'

'Not that I know of, Sir Harry.'

'Is he certain that there is one?'

'Quite certain,' replied Baltic, emphatically; 'if only on account of Jenthal's boast about being able to get money, and the fact that Bishop Pendle went up to London to procure the blackmail.'

'How does he know—how does anyone know that the bishop did so?'

'Because a butt was torn out of Dr Pendle's London cheque-book,' said Baltic, 'and I made inquiries at the Ophir Bank, which resulted in my discovery that a cheque for two hundred had been drawn on the day the bishop was in town.'

'Come now, Baltic, it is not likely that any bank would give you that information without a warrant; but I don't suppose you dared to procure one against his lordship.'

'Sir,' said Baltic, rolling up his red hand-kerchief, 'I had not sufficient evidence to procure a warrant, also I am not in the service of the Government, nevertheless, I have my own ways of procuring information, which I decline to explain. These served me so well in this instance that I know Bishop Pendle drew a cheque for two hundred pounds, and moreover, I have the numbers of the notes. If the money was paid to Jenthal, and afterwards was taken from his dead body by the assassin, I hope to trace these notes; in which case I may capture the murderer.'

'In your character of a private inquiry agent?'

'No, Sir Harry, I cannot take that much upon myself. I mentioned that one other person knew of my profession; that person is Inspector Tinkler.'

'Man!' cried Brace, with a start, 'you have not dared to accuse the bishop to Tinkler!'

'Oh, no, sir!' rejoined the ex-sailor, composedly. 'All I have done is to tell Tinkler that I wish to hunt down the murderer of Jenthal, and to induce him to obtain for me a warrant of arrest against Mother Jael.'

'Mother Jael, the gipsy hag! You don't suspect her, surely!'

'Not of the murder; but I suspect her of knowing the truth. Tinkler got me a warrant on the ground of her being concerned in the crime—say, as an accessory after the fact. To-morrow, Sir Harry, I ride over to the gipsy camp, and then with this warrant I intend to frighten Mother Jael into confessing what she knows.'

Harry smiled grimly. 'If you get the truth out of her you will be a clever man, Baltic. Does the bishop know that you suspect him?'

'I don't suspect him, sir,' replied Baltic, rising, 'and the bishop knows nothing, as he believes that I am a missionary.'

'Well, you are, in your own peculiar way.'

'Thank you, Sir Harry. Only you and Mr Cargrim and Mr Tinkler are aware of the truth, and I tell you all this, sir, as I neither approve of, nor believe in, Mr Cargrim. I am certain that Dr Pendle is innocent; Mr Cargrim is equally certain that he is guilty; so I am working to prove the truth, and that,' concluded the solemn Baltic, 'will not be what Mr Cargrim desires.'

'Good God! the man must hate the bishop.'

'Bating your taking the name of God in vain, sir, I believe he does.'

'Well, Baltic, I am greatly obliged to you for your confidence, and feel thankful that you are on our side. You can command my services in any way you like, but keep me posted up in all you do.'

'Sir!' said Baltic, gravely, shaking hands with his host, 'you can look upon me as your friend and well-wisher.'

CHAPTER XXVII

WHAT MOTHER JAELE KNEW

Now, when Baltic and his grizzled head had vanished, Sir Harry must needs betake himself to Dr Graham for the easing of his mind. The doctor had known the young man since he was a little lad, and on more than one occasion had given him that practical kind of advice which results from experience; therefore, when Harry was perplexed over matters too deep for him—as he was now—he invariably sought counsel of his old friend. In the present instance—for his own sake, for the sake of Lucy and Lucy's father—he told Graham the whole story of Bishop Pendle's presumed guilt; of Baltic's mission to disprove it; and of Cargrim's underhanded doings. Graham listened to the details in silence, and contented himself with a grim smile or two when Cargrim's treachery was touched upon. When in possession of the facts, he commented firstly on the behaviour of the chaplain.

'I always thought that the fellow was a cur!' said he, contemptuously, 'and now I am certain of it.'

'Curs bite, sir,' said Brace, sententiously, 'and we must muzzle this one else there will be the devil to pay.'

'No doubt, when Cargrim receives his wages. Well, lad, and what do you propose doing?'

'I came to ask your advice, doctor !'

'Here it is, then. Hold your tongue and do nothing.'

'What ! and leave that hound to plot against the bishop ?'

'A cleverer head than yours is counterplotting him, Brace,' warned the doctor. 'While Cargrim, having faith in Baltic, leaves the matter of the murder in his hands, there can be no open scandal.'

Harry stared, and moodily tugged at his moustache. 'I never thought to hear you hint that the bishop was guilty,' he grumbled.

'And I,' retorted Graham, 'never thought to hear a man of your sense make so silly a speech. The bishop is innocent ; I'll stake my life on that. Nevertheless, he has a secret, and if there is a scandal about this murder, the secret—whatever it is—may become public property.'

'Humph ! that is to be avoided certainly. But the secret can be nothing harmful.'

'If it were not,' replied Graham, drily, 'Pendle would not take such pains to conceal it. People don't pay two hundred pounds for nothing harmful, my lad.'

'Do you believe that the money was paid ?'

'Yes, on Southberry Heath, shortly before the murder. And what is more,' added Graham, warmly, 'I believe that the assassin knew that Jenthal had received the money, and shot him to obtain it.'

'If that is so,' argued Harry, 'the assassin would no doubt wish to take the benefit of his crime and use the money. If he did, the numbers of the notes being known, they would be traced, whereas—'

'Whereas Baltic, who got the numbers from the bank, has not yet had time to trace them. Wait, Brace, wait ! Time, in this matter, may work wonders.'

'But, doctor, do you trust Baltic ?'

'Yes, my friend, I always trust fanatics in their own particular line of monomania. Besides, for all his religious craze, Baltic appears to be a shrewd man ; also he is a silent one, so if anyone can carry the matter through judiciously, he is the person.'

'What about Cargrim ?'

'Leave him alone, lad ; with sufficient rope he'll surely hang himself.'

'Shouldn't the bishop be warned, doctor ?'

'I think not. If we watch Cargrim and trust Baltic we shall be able to protect Pendle from the consequences of his folly.'

'Folly ! What folly ?'

'The folly of having a secret. Only women should have secrets, for they alone know how to keep them.'

'Everyone is of the opposite opinion,' said Brace, with a grin.

'And, as usual, everyone is wrong,' retorted Graham. 'Do you think I have been a doctor all these years and don't know the sex ?—that is, so far as a man may know them. You take my word for it, Brace, that a woman

knows how to hold her tongue. It is a popular fallacy to suppose that she doesn't. You try and get a secret out of a woman which she thinks is worth keeping, and see how you'll fare. She will laugh, and talk and lie, and tell you everything—except what you want to know. What strength is to a man, cunning is to a woman. They are the potters, we are the clay, and—and—and my discourse is as discursive as that of Praed's vicar,' finished the doctor, with a dry chuckle.

'It has led us a long way from the main point,' agreed Harry, 'and that is—what is Dr Pendle's secret ?'

Graham shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. 'You ask more than I can tell you,' he said sadly. 'Whatever it is, Pendle intends to keep it to himself. All we can do is to trust Baltic.'

'Well, doctor,' said Harry, taking a reluctant leave, for he wished to thresh out the matter into absolute chaff, 'you know best, so I shall follow your advice.'

'I am glad of that,' was Graham's reply. 'My time is too valuable to be wasted.'

While this conversation was taking place, Baltic was walking briskly across the brown heath, in the full blaze of the noonday. A merciless sun flamed like a furnace in the cloudless sky ; and over the vast expanse of dry burnt herbage lay a veil of misty, tremulous heat. Every pool of water flashed like a mirror in the sun-rays ; the drone of myriad insects rose from the ground ; the lark's clear music rained down from the sky ; and the ex-sailor, trudging along the white and dusty highway, almost persuaded himself that he was back in some tropical land, less gorgeous, but quite as sultry, as the one he had left. The day was fitter for mid June rather than late September.

Baltic made so much concession to the unusual weather as to drape his red handkerchief over his head and place his Panama hat on top of it ; but he still wore the thick pilot suit, buttoned up tightly, and stepped out smartly, as though he were a salamander impervious to heat. With his long arms swinging by his side, his steady, grey eyes observant of all around him, he rolled on, in true nautical style, towards the gipsy camp. This was not hard to discover, for it lay only a mile or so from Southberry Junction, some little distance off the main road. The missionary saw a huddle of caravans, a few straying horses, a cluster of tawny, half-clad children rioting in the sunshine ; and knowing that this was his port of call, he stepped off the road on to the grass, and made directly for the encampment. He had a warrant for Mother Jael's arrest in his pocket, but save himself there was no one to execute it, and it might be difficult to take the old woman in charge when she was—so to speak—safe in the heart of her kingdom. However, Baltic regarded the warrant only as

a means to an end, and did not intend to use it, other than as a bogey to terrify Mother Jael into confession. He trusted more to his religiosity and persuasive capabilities than to the power of the law. Nevertheless, being practical as well as sentimental, he was glad to have the warrant in case of need; for it was possible that a heathenish witch like Mother Jael might fear man more than God. Finally, Baltic had some experience of casting religious pearls before pagan swine, and therefore was discreet in his use of spiritual remedies.

Dogs barked and children screeched when Baltic stepped into the circle formed by caravans and tents; and several swart, sinewy, gipsy men darted threatening glances at him as an intrusive stranger. There burned a fire near one of the caravans, over which was slung a kettle, swinging from a tripod of iron, and this was filled with some savoury stew, which sent forth appetizing odours. A dark, handsome girl, with golden earrings, and a yellow handkerchief twisted picturesquely round her black hair, was the cook, and she turned to face Baltic with a scowl when he inquired for Mother Jael. Evidently the Gentiles were no favourites in the camp of these outcasts, for the men lounging about murmured, the women tittered and sneered, and the very children spat out evil words in the Romany language. But Baltic, used to black skins and black looks, was not daunted by this inhospitable reception, and in grave tones repeated his inquiry for the sibyl.

'Who are you, juggel-mush?*' asked a sinister-looking Hercules.

'I am one who wishes to see Mother Jael,' replied Baltic, in his deep voice.

'Arromali!† sneered the Cleopatra-like cook. 'She has more to do than to see every cheating, choring Gentile.'

'Give me money, my royal master,' croaked a frightful cripple. 'My own little purse is empty.'

'Oh, what a handsome Gorgio!' whined a hag, interspersing her speech with curses. '(May evil befall him!) Good luck for gold, dearie. (I spit on your corpse, Gentile!) Charity! Charity!'

A girl seated on the steps of a caravan cracked her fingers, and spitting three times for the evil eye, burst into a song:—

'With my kissings and caressings
I can gain gold from the gypsies;
But to evil change my blessings.'

All this clatter and clamour of harsh voices, mousing the wild gipsies' jargon, had no effect on Baltic. Seeing that he could gain nothing from the mocking crowd, he pushed back one or two, who seemed disposed to be affectionate with a view to robbing his

pockets, and shouted loudly, 'Mother Jael! Mother Jael!' till the place rang with his roaring.

Before the gypsies could recover from their astonishment at this sudden change of front, a dishevelled grey head was poked out from one of the black tents, and a thin high voice piped, 'Dearie! lovey! Mother Jael be here!'

'I thought I would bring you out of your burrow,' said Baltic, grimly, as he strode towards her; 'in with you again, old Witch of Endor, and let me follow.'

'Hindity-Mush!*' growled one or two, but the appearance of Mother Jael, and a few words from her, sent the whole gang back to their idling and working; while Baltic, quite undisturbed, dropped on all fours and crawled into the black tent, at the tail of the hag. She croaked out a welcome to her visitor, and squatting on a tumbled mattress, leered at him like a foul old toad. Baltic sat down near the opening of the tent, so as to get as much fresh air as possible, and also to watch Mother Jael's face by the glimmer of light which crept in. Spreading his handsome handkerchief on his knee, according to custom, and placing his hat thereon, he looked straight at the old hag, and spoke slowly.

'Do you know why I am here, old woman?' he demanded.

'Yes, dearie, yes! Ain't it yer fortin as y' wan's tole? Oh, my pretty one, you asks ole mother for a fair future! I knows! I knows!'

'You know wrong then!' retorted Baltic, coolly. 'I am one who has no dealings with witches and familiar spirits. I ask you to tell me, not my fortune—which lies in the hand of the Almighty—but the name of the man who murdered the creature Jenthant.'

Mother Jael made an odd whistling sound, and her cunning old face became as expressionless as a mask. In a second, save for her wicked black eyes, which shone like two sparks of fire under her drooping lids, she became a picture of stupidity and senility. 'Bless 'ee, my pretty master, I knows nought; all I knows I told the Gentiles yonder, and the hag pointed a crooked finger in the direction of Beorminster.'

'Mother of the witches, you lie!' cried Baltic, in very good Romany.

The eyes of Mother Jael blazed up like torches at the sound of the familiar tongue, and she eyed the weather-beaten face of Baltic with an amazement too genuine to be feigned. 'Duvel!' said she, in a high key of astonishment, 'who is this Gorgio who patters with the gab of a gentle Romany?'

'I am a brother of the tribe, my sister.'

* Juggel-mush: a dog-man.

† Arromali: truly.

* Hindity-Mush: a dirty creature.

'No gipsy, though,' said the hag, in the black language. 'You have not the glossy eye of the true Roman.'

'No Roman am I, my sister, save by adoption. As a lad I left the Gentiles' roof for the merry tent of Egypt, and for many years I called Lovels and Stanleys my blood-brothers.'

'Then why come you with a double face, little child?' croaked the beldam, who knew that Baltic was speaking the truth from his knowledge of the gipsy tongue. 'As a Gentile I would speak no word, but my brother you are, and as my brother you shall know.'

'Know who killed Jentham!' said Baltic, hastily.

'Of a truth, brother. But call him not Jentham, for he was of Pharaoh's blood.'

'A gipsy, mother, or only a Romany rye?'

'Of the old blood, of the true blood, of our religion verily, my brother. One of the Lovels he was, who left our merry life to eat with Gorgios and fiddle gold out of their pockets.'

'He called himself Amaru then, did he not?' said Baltic, who had heard this much from Cargrim, to whom it had filtered from Miss Whichello through Tinkler.

'It is so, brother. Amaru he called himself, and Jentham and Creaght, and a dozen other names when cheating and chorng the Gentiles. But a Bosvile he was born, and a Bosvile he died.'

'That is just it!' said Baltic, in English, for he grew weary of using the gipsy language, in which, from disuse, he was no great proficient. 'How did he die?'

'He was shot, lovey,' replied Mother Jael, relapsing also into the vulgar tongue; 'shot, dearie, on this blessed common.'

'Who shot him?'

'Job! my noble rye, I can't say. Jentham, he come 'ere to patter the calo jib and drink with us. He said as he had to see some Gentile on that night! La! la! la!' she piped thinly, 'an evil night for him!' 'On Sunday night — the night he was killed?'

'Yes, pretty one. The Gorgio was to give him money for somethin' he knowed.'

'Who was the Gorgio?'

'I don' know, lovey! I don' know!'

'What was the secret, then?' asked Baltic, casting round for information.

'Ble-s 'ee, my tiny! Jentham nivir tolle me. An' I was curis to know, my dove, so when he walks away half-seas over I goes too. I follows, lovey, I follow, but I nivir did catch him up, fur rain and storm comed mos' dreful.'

'Did you not see him on that night, then?'

'Sight of my eyes, I sawr' im dead. I 'eard a shot, and I run, and run, dearie, fur I know'd as 'e 'ad no pistol; but I los'

m'way, my royal rye, and it was ony when th' storm rolled off as I foun' 'im. He was lyin' in a ditch. Such was his grave, continued Mother Jael, speaking in her own tongue, 'water and grass and storm-clouds above, brother. I was afraid to touch him, afraid to wait, as these Gentiles might think I had slain the man. I got back into the road, I did, and there I picked up this, which I brought to the camp with me. But I never showed it to the police, brother, for I feared the Gentile jails.'

This proved to be a neat little silver-mounted pistol which Mother Jael fished out from the interior of the mattress. Baltic balanced it in his hand, and believing, as was surely natural, that Jentham had been killed with this weapon, he examined it carefully.

'G. P.,' said he, reading the initials graven on the silver shield of the butt.

'Ah!' chuckled Mother Jael, hugging herself. 'George Pendle that is, lovey. But which of 'em, my tender dove—the father or the son?'

'Humph!' remarked Baltic, meditatively, 'they are both called George.'

'But they ain' both called murderer, my brother. George Pendle shot that Bosvile sure enough, an' ef y'arsk me, dearie, it was the son—the captain—the sodger. Ah, that it was!'

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE RETURN OF GABRIEL

'My dear Daisy, I am sorry you are going away, as it has been a great pleasure for me to have you in my house. I hope you will visit me again next year, and then you may be more fortunate.'

Mrs Pansey made this amiable little speech —which nevertheless, like a scorpion, had a sting in its tail—to Miss Norham on the platform of the Beaminster railway station. After a stay of two months, the town mouse was departing as she had come — a single young woman; and Mrs Pansey's last word was meant to remind her of failure. Daisy was quick enough to guess this, but, displeased at the taunt, chose to understand it in another and more gracious sense, so as to disconcert her spiteful friend.

'Fortunate! Oh, dear Mrs Pansey, I have been very fortunate this time. Really, you have been most kind; you have given me everything I wanted.'

'Excepting a husband, my dear,' rejoined the archdeacon's widow, determined that there should be no misunderstanding this time.

'Ah! it was out of your power to give me a husband,' murmured Daisy, wincing.

'Quite true, my dear; just as it was out of your power to gain one for yourself. Still, I am sorry that Dr Alder did not propose.'

'Indeed!' Daisy tossed her head. 'I should certainly have refused him had he done so. A woman may not marry her grandfather.'

'A woman may not, but a woman would, rather than remain single,' snapped Mrs Pansey, with considerable spite.

Miss Norsham carefully inserted a corner of a foolish little handkerchief into one eye. 'Oh, dear, I do call it nasty of you to speak to me so,' said she, tearfully. 'You needn't think, like all men do, that every woman wants to be married. I'm sure I don't.'

The old lady smiled grimly at this appalling lie, but thinking that she had been a little hard on her departing guest, hastened to apologise. 'I'm sure you don't, dear, and very sensible it is of you to say so. Judging from my own experience with the arch-deacon, I should certainly advise no one to marry.'

'You are wise after the event,' muttered Daisy, with some anger, 'but here is my train, Mrs Pansey, thank you!' and she slipped into a first-class carriage, looking decidedly cross and very defiant. To fail in husband-hunting was bad enough, but to be taunted with the failure was unbearable. Daisy no longer wondered that Mrs Pansey was hated in Beaminster; her own feelings at the moment urged her to thrust the good lady under the wheels of the engine.

'Well, dear, I'll say good-bye,' said Mrs Pansey, screwing her grim face into an amiable smile. 'Be sure you give my love to your mother, dear,' and the two kissed with that show of affection to be seen existing between ladies who do not love one another over much.

'Horrid old cat!' said Daisy to herself, as she waved her handkerchief from the now moving train.

'Dear me! how I dislike that girl,' soliloquised Mrs Pansey, shaking her reticule at the departing Daisy. 'Well! well! no one can say that I have not done my duty by her,' and much pleased with herself, the good lady stalked majestically out of the station, on the lookout to seize upon and worry any of her friends who might be in the vicinity. For his sins Providence sent Gabriel into her clutches, and Mrs Pansey was transfixed with astonishment at the sight of him issuing from the station.

'Mr Pend'e!' she said, placing herself directly in his way, 'I thought you were at Nauheim. What is wrong? Is your mother ill? Is she coming back? Are you in trouble?'

Gabriel could not answer all, or even one of these questions on the instant, for the sudden appearance and speech of the Beaminster busybody had taken him by surprise. He

looked haggard and white, and there were dark circles under his eyes, as though he suffered from want of sleep. Still, the journey from Nauheim might account for his weary looks, and would have done so to anyone less suspicious than Mrs Pansey; but that good lady scented a mystery, and wanted an explanation. This Gabriel, with less than his usual courtesy, declined to furnish. However, to give her some food for her mind, he answered her questions categorically.

'I have just returned from Nauheim, Mrs Pansey,' he said hurriedly. 'There is nothing wrong, so far as I am aware. My mother is much better, and is benefiting greatly by the baths. She is coming back within the month, and I am not in trouble. Is there anything else you wish to know?'

'Yes, Mr Pendle, there is,' said Mrs Pansey, in no wise abashed. 'Why do you look so ill?'

'I am not ill, but I have had a long sea-passage, a weary railway journey, and I feel hot, and dirty, and worn out. Naturally, under the circumstances, I don't look the picture of health.'

'Humph! trips abroad don't do *you* much good.'

Gabriel bowed, and turned away to direct the porter to place his portmanteau in a fly. Offended by his silence, Mrs Pansey shook out her skirts and tossed her sable plumes. 'You have not brought back French politeness, young man,' said Mrs Pansey, acridly.

'I have been in Germany,' retorted Gabriel, as though that fact accounted for his lack of courtesy. 'Good-bye for the present, Mrs Pansey; I'll apologise for my short-comings when I recover from my journey.'

'Oh, you will, will you?' growled the arch-deacon's widow, as Gabriel lifted his hat and drove off; 'you'll do more than apologise, young man, you'll explain. Hoity-toity! here's brazen assurance,' and Mrs Pansey, with her Roman beak in the air, marched off, wondering in her own curious mind what could be the reason of Gabriel's sudden return.

Her curiosity would have been gratified had she been present in Dr Graham's consulting-room an hour later; for after Gabriel had bathed and brushed up at his lodgings, he paid an immediate visit to the little doctor. Graham happened to be at home, as he had not yet set out on his round of professional visits, and he was as much astonished as Mrs Pansey when the curate made his appearance. Also, like Mrs Pansey, he was struck by the young man's worn looks.

'What! Gabriel,' he cried, when the curate entered, 'this is an unexpected pleasure. You look ill, lad!'

'I am ill,' replied Gabriel, dropping into a chair with an air of fatigue. 'I feel very much worried, and I have come to ask for your advice.'

'Very pleased to give it to you, my boy, but why not consult the bishop?'

'My father is the last man in the world I would consult, doctor.'

'That is a strange speech, Gabriel,' said Graham, with a keen look.

'It is the prelude to a stranger story! I have come to confide in you because you have known me all my life, doctor, and because you are the most intimate friend my father has.'

'Have you been getting into trouble?'

'No. My story concerns my father more than it does me.'

'Concerns your father!' repeated the doctor, with a sudden recollection of the bishop's secret. 'Are you sure that I am the proper person to consult?'

'I am certain of it. I know—I know—well, what I do know is something I have not the courage to speak to my father about. For God's sake, doctor, let me tell you my suspicions and hear your advice.'

'Your suspicions!' said Graham, starting from his chair, with a chill in his blood. 'About—about—that—that murder?'

'God forbid, doctor. No! not about the murder, but about the man who was murdered.'

'Jenthal?'

'Yes, about the man who called himself Jenthal. Are you sure we are quite private here, doctor?'

Graham nodded, and walking to the door turned the key. Then he came back to his seat and fixed his eyes on the perturbed face of the young man. 'Does your father know that you are back?' he asked.

'No one knows that I am here save Mrs Pansey.'

'Then it won't be a secret long,' said Graham, drolly; 'that old magpie is as good as the town-crier. You left your mother well?'

'Quite well; and Lucy also. I made an excuse to come back.'

'Then your mother and sister do not know what you are about to tell me?'

Graham made a gesture of horror. 'God forbid!' said he again, then clasped his hands over his white face and burst into half hysterical speech. 'Oh, the horror of it, the horror of it!' he wailed. 'If what I know is true, then all our lives are ruined.'

'Is it so very terrible, my boy?'

'So terrible that I dare not question my father! I must tell you, for only you can advise and help us all. Doctor! doctor! the very thought drives me mad—indeed, I feel half mad already.'

'You are worn out, Gabriel. Wait one moment.'

The doctor saw that his visitor's nerves were overstrained, and that, unless the tension were relaxed, he would probably end in having a fit of hysteria. The poor young fellow, born of a weakly mother, was neurotic in the extreme,

and had in him a feminine strain, which made him unequal to facing trouble or anxiety. Even as he sat there, shaking and white-faced, the nerve-storm came on, and racked and knotted and tortured every fibre of his being, until a burst of tears came to his relief, and almost in a swoon he lay back limply in his chair. Graham mixed him a strong dose of valerian, felt his pulse, and made him lie down on the sofa. Also, he darkened the room, and placed a wet handkerchief on the curate's forehead. Gabriel closed his eyes, and lay on the couch as still as any corpse, while the doctor, who knew what he suffered, watched him with infinite pity.

'Poor lad!' he murmured, holding Gabriel's hand in his firm, warm clasp. 'Nature is indeed a harsh stepmother to you. With your nerves, the pin-prickles of life are so many dagger-thrusts. Do you feel better now?' he asked, as Gabriel opened his eyes with a languid sigh.

'Much better and more composed,' replied the wan curate, sitting up. 'You have given me a magical drug.'

'You may well call it that. This particular preparation of valerian is nepenthe for the nerves. But you are not quite recovered yet; the swell remains after the storm, you know. Why not postpone your story?'

'I cannot! I dare not!' said Gabriel, earnestly. 'I must ease my mind by telling it to you. Doctor, do you know that the visitor who made my father ill on the night of the reception was Jenthal?'

'No, my boy, I did not know that. Who told you?'

'John, our old servant, who admitted him. He told me about Jenthal just before I went to Nauheim.'

'Did Jenthal give his name?'

'No, but John, like many other people, saw the body in the dead-house. He there recognised Jenthal by his gipsy looks and the scar on his face. Well, doctor, I wondered what the man could have said to so upset the bishop, but of course I did not dare to ask him. By the time I got to Germany the episode passed out of my mind.'

'And what recalled it?'

'Something my mother said. We were in the Kurgarten listening to the band when a Heidelberg student, with his face all seamed and slashed, walked past us.'

'I know; students in Germany are proud of those duelling scars. Well, Gabriel, and what then?'

The curate quivered all over, and instead of replying directly, asked what seemed to be an irrelevant question. 'Did you know that my mother was a widow when my father married her?' he demanded in low tones.

'Of course I did,' replied Graham, cheerily. 'I was practising in Marylebone then, and your father was vicar of St Benedict's. Why, I was at his wedding, Gabriel, and very pretty

your mother looked. She was a Mrs Krant, whose husband had been killed while serving as a volunteer in the Franco-Prussian War !

'Did you ever see her husband ?'

'No ; she did not come to Marylebone until he had left her. The rascal deserted the poor young thing and went abroad to fight. But why do you ask all these questions ? They cannot but be painful.'

'Because the sight of that student's face recalled her first husband to my mother. She said that Krant had a long scar on the right cheek. I immediately thought of Jentharn.'

'Good God !' cried Graham, pushing back his chair. 'What do you mean, lad ?'

'Wait ! wait !' said Gabriel, feverishly. 'I asked my mother to describe the features of her first husband. Not suspecting my reason for asking, she did so. Krant, she said, was tall, lean, swart and black-eyed, with a scar on the right cheek running from the ear to the mouth. Doctor !' cried Gabriel, clutching Graham's hand, 'that is the very portrait of the man Jentharn.'

'Gabriel !' whispered the little doctor, hoarsely, 'do you mean to say—'

'I mean to say that Krant did not die, that Jentharn was Krant, and that when he called on my father he appeared as one from the dead. He is dead now, but he was alive when my mother became my father's wife.'

'Impossible ! Impossible !' repeated Graham, who was ashy pale, and shaken out of his ordinary self. 'Krant died—died at Sedan. Your father went over and saw his grave !'

'He did not see the corpse, though. I tell you I am right, doctor. Krant did not die. My mother is not my father's wife, and we—we—George, Lucy and myself are in the eyes of the law—nobody's children.' The curate uttered these last words almost in a shriek, and fell back on the couch, covering his face with two trembling hands.

Graham sat staring straight before him with an expression of absolute horror on his withered brown face. He recalled Pendle's sudden illness after Jentharn had paid that fatal visit ; his refusal to confess the real cause of his attack ; his admission that he had a secret which he did not dare to reveal even to his oldest friend, and his strange act in sending away his wife and daughter to Nauheim. All these things gave colour to Gabriel's supposition that Jentharn was Krant returned from the dead ; but after all it was a supposition merely, and quite unsupported by fact.

'There is no proof of it,' said Graham, hoarsely ; 'no proof.'

'Ask my father for the proof,' murmured Gabriel. 'I dare not !'

The doctor could understand that speech very well, and now saw the reason why Gabriel had chosen to speak to him rather than to the bishop. It might be true, after all, this frightful fact, he thought, and as in a flash he saw ruin, disaster, shame, terror

following in the train of its becoming known. This, then, was the bishop's secret, and Graham in his quick way decided that at all costs it must be preserved, if only for the sake of Mrs Pendle and her children. The first step towards attaining this end was to see the bishop and hear confirmation or denial from his own lips. Once Graham knew all the facts he fancied that he might in some way—at present he knew not how—help his wretched friend. With characteristic promptitude he decided on the spot how to act.

'Gabriel,' he said, bending over the unhappy young man, 'I shall see your father about this at once. I cannot, I dare not believe it to be true, unless with his own lips he confirms the identity of Krant with Jentharn. You wait here until I return, and sleep if you can.'

'Sleep !' groaned Gabriel. 'Oh, God ! shall I ever sleep again ?'

'My friend,' said the little doctor, solemnly, 'you have no right to doubt your father's honour until you hear what he has to say. Jentharn may not be Krant as you suspect. It may be a chance likeness—a—'

Graham shook his head. 'You can't argue away what I know to be true,' he muttered, looking at the floor with dry, wild eyes. 'See my father and tell him what I have told you. He will not be able to deny his shame and the disgrace of his children.'

'That we shall see,' said Graham, with a cheerfulness he was far from feeling. 'I shall see him at once. Gabriel, my boy, hope for the best !'

Again the curate shook his head, and with a groan flung himself down on the couch with his face to the wall. Seeing that words were vain, the doctor threw one glance of pity on his prostrate form, and with a sigh passed out of the room.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE CONFESSION OF BISHOP PENDLE

MR CARGRIM was very much out of temper, and Baltic was the cause of his unchristian state of mind. As the employer of the so-called missionary and actual inquiry agent, the chaplain expected to be informed of every fresh discovery, but with this view Baltic did not concur. In his solemn way he informed Cargrim that he preferred keeping his information and methods and suspicions to himself until he was sure of capturing the actual criminal. When the man was lodged in Beornminster Jail—when his complicity in the crime was proved beyond all doubt—then Baltic promised to write out, for the edification of his employer, a detailed

account of the steps taken to bring about so satisfactory a result. And from this stern determination all Cargrim's arguments failed to move him.

This state of things was the more vexatious as Cargrim knew that the ex-sailor had seen Mother Jael, and shrewdly suspected that he had obtained from the beldam valuable information likely to incriminate the bishop. Whether his newly-found evidence did so or not, Baltic gravely declined to say, and Cargrim was furious at being left in ignorance. He was particularly anxious that Dr Pendle's guilt should be proved without loss of time, as Mr Leigh of Heathcroft was sinking rapidly, and on any day a new rector might be needed for that very desirable parish. Certainly Cargrim, as he fondly imagined, had thwarted Gabriel's candidature by revealing the young man's love for Bell Mosk to the bishop. Still, even if Gabriel were not nominated, Dr Pendle had plainly informed Cargrim that he need not expect the appointment, so the chaplain foresaw that unless he obtained power over the bishop before Leigh's death, the benefice would be given to some stranger. It was no wonder, then, that he resented the silence of Baltic, and felt enraged at his own impotence. He almost regretted having sought the assistance of a man who appeared more likely to be a hindrance than a help. For once, Cargrim's scheming brain could devise no remedy.

Lurking about the library as usual, Mr Cargrim was much astonished to receive a visit from Dr Graham. Of course, the visit was to the bishop, but Cargrim, being alone in the library, came forward in his silky, obsequious way to receive the new-comer, and politely asked what he could do for him.

'You can inform the bishop that I wish to see him, if you please,' said Graham, with a perfectly expressionless face.

'His lordship is at present taking a short rest,' replied Cargrim, blandly, 'but anything I can do—'

'You can do nothing, Mr Cargrim. I wish for a private interview with Dr Pendle.'

'Your business must be important.'

'It is,' retorted Graham, abruptly; 'so important that I must see the bishop at once.'

'Oh, certainly, doctor. I am sorry to see that you do not look well.'

'Thank you; I am as well as can be expected.'

'Really! considering what, Dr Graham?'

'Considering the way I am kept waiting here, Mr Cargrim,' after which pointed speech there was nothing left for the defeated chaplain but to retreat as gracefully as he could. Yet Cargrim might have known, from past experience, that a duel of words with sharp-tongued Dr Graham could only end in his discomfiture. But in spite of all his cunning he usually burnt his fingers at a twice-touched flame.

Extremely curious to know the reason of Graham's unexpected visit and haggard looks, Cargrim, having informed the bishop that the doctor was waiting for him, attempted to make a third in the interview by gliding in behind his superior. Graham, however, was too sharp for him, and after a few words with the bishop, intimated to the chaplain that his presence was not necessary. So Cargrim, like the Peri at the Gates of Paradise, was forced to lurk as near the library door as he dared, and he strained his ears in vain to overhear what the pair were talking about. Had he known that the revelation of Bishop Pendle's secret formed the gist of the interview, he would have been even more enraged than he was. But, for the time being, Fate was against the wily chaplain, and, in the end, he was compelled to betake himself to a solitary and sulky walk, during which his reflections concerning Graham and Baltic were the reverse of amiable. As a defeated sneak, Mr Cargrim was not a credit to his cloath.

Dr Pendle had the bewildered air of a man suddenly roused from sleep, and was inclined to be peevish with Graham for calling at so untoward a time. Yet it was five o'clock in the afternoon, which was scarcely a suitable hour for slumber, as the doctor bluntly remarked.

'I was not asleep,' said the bishop, settling himself at his writing-table. 'I simply lay down for half-an-hour or so.'

'Worn out with worry, I suppose?'

'Yes,' Dr Pendle sighed; 'my burden is almost greater than I can bear.'

'I quite agree with you,' replied Graham, 'therefore I have come to help you to bear it.'

'That is impossible. To do so, you must know the truth, and—God help me!—I dare not tell it even to you.'

'There is no need for you to do so, Pendle. I know your secret.'

The bishop twisted his chair round with a rapid movement and stared at the sympathetic face of Graham with an expression of blended terror and amazement. Hardly cou'd his tongue frame itself to speech.

'You—know—my—secret!' stammered Pendle, with pale lips.

'Yes, I know that Krant did not die at Sedan as we supposed. I know that he returned to life—to Beormminster—to you, under the name of Jentham! Hold up, man! don't give way,' for the bishop, with a heavy sigh, had fallen forward on his desk, and, with his grey head buried in his arms, lay there silent and broken down in an agony of doubt, and fear and shame.

'Play the man, George Pendle,' said Graham, who knew that the father was more virile than the son, and therefore needed the tonic of words rather than the soothing anodyne of medicine. 'If you believe in

what you preach, if you are a true servant of your God, call upon religion, upon your Deity, for help to bear your troubles. Stand up manfully, my friend, and face the worst !'

'Alas ! alas ! many waters have gone over me, Graham.'

'Can you expect anything else if you permit yourself to sink without an effort?' said the doctor, rather cynically ; 'but if you cannot gain strength from Christianity, then be a Stoic, and independent of supernatural aid.'

The bishop lifted his head and suddenly rose to his full height, until he towered above the little doctor. His pale face took upon itself a calmer expression, and stretching out his arm, he rolled forth a text from the Psalms in his deepest voice, in his most stately manner : 'In God is my salvation and my glory, the rock of my strength, and my refuge is in God.'

'Good !' said Graham, with a satisfied nod ; 'that is the proper spirit in which to meet trouble. And now, Pendle, with your leave, we will approach the subject with more particularity.'

'It will be as well,' replied the bishop, and he spoke collectedly and gravely, with no trace of his late excitement. When he most needed it, strength had come to him from above ; and he was able to discuss the sore matter of his domestic troubles with courage and with judgment.

'How did you learn my secret, Graham ?' he asked, after a pause.

'Indirectly from Gabriel.'

'Gabriel,' said the bishop, trembling, 'is at Nauheim !'

'You are mistaken, Pendle. He returned to Beorminster this morning, and as he was afraid to speak to you on the subject of Jentham, he came to ask my advice. The poor lad is broken down and ill, and is now lying in my consulting-room until I return.'

'How did Gabriel learn the truth ?' asked Pendle with a look of pain.

'From something his mother said.'

The bishop, in spite of his enforced calmness, groaned aloud. 'Does she know of it ?' he murmured, while drops of perspiration beaded his forehead and betrayed his inward agony. 'Could not that shame be spared me ?'

'Do not be hasty, Pendle, your wife knows nothing.'

'Thank God !' said the bishop, fervently ; then added, almost immediately, 'You say my wife. Alas ! alas ! that I dare not call her so.'

'It is true, then ?' asked Graham, becoming very pale.

'Perfectly true. Krant was not killed. Krant returned here under the name of Jentham. My wife is not my wife ! My children are illegitimate ; they have no name ; outcasts

they are. Oh, the shame ! Oh, the disgrace !' and Dr Pendle groaned aloud.

Graham sympathised with the man's distress, which was surely natural under the terrible calamity which had befallen him and his. George Pendle was a priest, a prelate, but he was also a son of Adam, and liable, like all mortals, the strongest as the weakest, to moments of doubt, of fear, of trembling, of utter dismay. Had the evil come upon him alone, he might have borne it with more patience, but when it parted him from his dearly-loved wife, when it made outcasts of the children he was so proud of, who can wonder that he should feel inclined to cry with Job, 'Is it good unto Thee that Thou shouldst oppress ?' Nevertheless, like Job, the bishop held fast his integrity.

Yet that he might have some comfort in his affliction, that one pang might be spared to him, Graham assured him that Mrs Pendle was ignorant of the truth, and related in full the story of how Gabriel had come to connect Jentham with Krant. Pendle listened in silence, and inwardly thanked God that at least so much mercy had been vouchsafed him. Then in his turn he made a confidant of his old friend, recalled the early days of his courtship and marriage, spoke of the long interval of peace and quiet happiness which he and his wife had enjoyed, and ended with a detailed account of the disguised Krant's visit and threats, and the anguish his reappearance had caused.

'You remember, Graham !' he said, with wonderful self-control, 'how almost thirty years ago I was the Vicar of St Benedict's in Marylebone, and how you, my old college friend, practised medicine in the same parish.'

'I remember, Pendle ; there is no need for you to make your heart ache by recalling the past.'

'I must, my friend,' said the bishop, firmly, 'in order that you may fully understand my position. As you know, my dear wife—for I still must call her so—came to reside there under her married name of Mrs Krant. She was poor and unhappy, and when I called upon her, as the vicar of the parish, she told me her miserable story. How she had left her home and family for the sake of that wretch who had attracted her weak, girlish affections by his physical beauty and fascinating manners ; how he treated her ill, spent the most of her money, and finally left her within a year of the marriage, with just enough remaining out of her fortune to save her from starvation. She told me that Krant had gone to Paris, and was serving as a volunteer in the French army, while she, broken down and unhappy, had come to my parish to give herself to God and labour amongst the poor.'

'She was a charming woman ! She is so now !' said Graham, with a sigh. 'I do not wonder that you loved her.'

'Loved, sir! Why speak in the past tense? I love her still. I shall always love that sweet companion of these many happy years. From the time I saw her in those poor London lodgings I loved her with all the strength of my manhood. But you know that, being already married, she could not be my wife. Then, shortly after the surrender of Sedan, that letter came to tell her that her husband was dead, and dying, had asked her pardon for his wicked ways. Alas! alas! that letter was false!'

'We both of us believed it to be genuine at the time, Pendle, and you went over to France after the war to see the man's grave.'

'I did, and I saw the grave—saw it with its tombstone, in a little Alsace graveyard, with the name Stephen Krant painted thereon in black German letters. I never doubted but that he lay below, and I looked far and wide for the man, Leon Durand, who had written that letter at the request of his dying comrade. I ask you, Graham, who would have disbelieved the evidence of letter and tombstone?'

'No one, certainly!' replied Graham, gravely; 'but it was a pity that you could not find Leon Durand, so as to put the matter beyond all doubt.'

'Find him!' echoed the bishop, passionately. 'No one on earth could have found the man. He did not exist.'

'Then who wrote the letter?'

'Krant himself, as he told me in this very room, the wicked plotter!'

'But his handwriting; would not his wife have—'

'No!' cried Pendle, rising and pacing to and fro, greatly agitated, 'the man disguised his hand so that his wife should not recognise it. He did not wish to be bound to her, but to wander far and wide, and live his own sinful life. That was why he sent the forged letter to make Amy believe that he was dead. And she did believe, the more especially after I returned to tell how I had seen his grave. I thought also that he was dead. So did you, Graham.'

'Certainly,' assented Graham, 'there was no reason to doubt the fact. Who would have believed that Krant was such a scoundrel?'

'I called him that when he came to see me here,' said Dr Pendle, with a passionate gesture. 'Old man and priest as I am, I could have killed him as he sat in yonder chair, smiling at my misery, and taunting me with my position.'

'How did he find out that you had married Mrs Krant?'

'By going back to the Marylebone parish. He had been wandering all over the face of the earth, like the Cain he was; but meeting with no good fortune, he came back to England to find out Amy, and, I suppose, rob her of the little money he had permitted her to keep. He knew of her address in

Marylebone, as she had told him where she was going before he deserted her.'

'But how did he learn about the marriage?' asked Graham, again.

'I cannot tell; but he knew that his wife, after his desertion, devoted herself to good works, so no doubt he went to the church and asked about her. The old verger who saw us married is still alive, so I suppose he told Krant that Amy was my wife, and that I was the Bishop of Beormminster. But, however he learned the truth, he found his way here, and when I came into this room during the reception I found him waiting for me.'

'How did you recognise a man you had not seen?'

'By a portrait Amy had shown me, and by the description she gave me of his gipsy looks and the scar on his cheek. He had not altered at all, and I beheld before me the same wicked face I had seen in the portrait. I was confused at first, as I knew the face but not the name. When he told me that he was Stephen Krant, that my wife was really his wife, that my children had no name, I—I—oh, God!' cried Pendle, covering his face with his hands, 'it was terrible! terrible!'

'My poor friend!'

The bishop threw himself into a chair. 'After close on thirty years,' he moaned, 'think of it, Graham—the shame, the horror! Oh, God!'

CHAPTER XXX

BLACKMAIL

FOR some moments Graham did not speak, but looked with pity on the grief-shaken frame and bowed shoulders of his sorely-tried friend. Indeed, the position of the man was such that he did not see what comfort he could administer, and so, very wisely, held his peace. However, when the bishop, growing more composed, remained still silent, he could not forbear offering him a trifle of consolation.

'Don't grieve so, Pendle!' he said, laying his hand on the other's shoulder; 'it is not your fault that you are in this position.'

The bishop sighed, and murmured with a shake of his head, 'Omnis qui facit peccatum, servus est peccati!'

'But you have not done sin!' cried Graham, dissenting from the text. 'You! your wife! myself! everyone thought that Krant was dead and buried. The man fled, and lied, and forged, to gain his freedom—to shake off the marriage bonds which galled him. He was the sinner, not you, my poor innocent friend!'

'True enough, doctor, but I am the

sufferer. Had God in His mercy not sustained me in my hour of trial, I do not know how I should have borne my misery, weak, erring mortal that I am.'

'That speech is one befitting your age and office,' said the doctor, gravely, 'and I quite approve of it. All the same, there is another religious saying—I don't know if it can be called a text—"God helps those who help themselves." You will do well, Pendle, to lay that to heart.'

'How can I help myself?' said the bishop, hopelessly. 'The man is dead now, without doubt; but he was alive when I married his supposed widow, therefore the ceremony is null and void. There is no getting behind that fact.'

'Have you consulted a lawyer on your position?'

'No. The law cannot sanction a union—at least in my eyes—which I know to be against the tenets of the Church. So far as I know, if a husband deserts his wife, and is not heard of for seven years, she can marry again after that period without being liable to prosecution as a bigamist, but in any case the second ceremony is not legal.'

'Mrs. Krant became your wife before the expiration of seven years, I know,' said Graham, wrinkling his brow.

'Certainly. And therefore she is—in the eyes of the law—a bigamist'—the bishop shuddered—'although, God knows, she fully believed her husband to be dead. But the religious point of view is the one I take, doctor; as a Churchman, I cannot live with a woman whom I know is not my wife. It was for that reason that I sent her away!'

'But you cannot keep her away for ever, bishop!—at all events, unless you explain the position to her.'

'I dare not do that in her present state of health; the shock would kill her. No, Graham, I see that sooner or later she must know, but I wished for her absence that I might gain time to consider my terrible position. I have considered it in every way—but, God help me! I can see no hope—no escape. Alas! alas! I am sorely, sorely tried.'

Graham reflected. 'Are you perfectly certain that Jentham and Krant are one and the same man?' he asked doubtfully.

'I am certain of it,' replied Pendle, decisively. 'I could not be deceived in the dark gipsy face, in the peculiar cicatrice on the right cheek. And he knew all about my wife, Graham—about her family, her maiden name, the amount of her fortune, her taking up parish work in Marylebone. Above all, he showed me the certificate of his marriage, and a number of letters written to him by Amy, reproaching him with his cruel desertion. Oh, there can be no doubt that this Jentham is—or rather was—Stephen Krant.'

'It would seem so!' sighed Graham,

heavily. 'Evidently there is no hope of proving him to be an impostor in the face of such evidence. He came to extort money, I suppose?'

'Need you ask?' said the bishop, bitterly. 'Yes, his sole object was blackmail; he was content to let things remain as they are, provided his silence was purchased at his own price. He told me that if I paid him two hundred pounds he would hand over certificate and letters and disappear, never to trouble me again.'

'I doubt if such a blackguard would keep his word, Pendle. Moreover, although novelists and dramatists attach such a value to marriage certificates, they are really not worth the paper they are written on—save, perhaps, as immediate evidence. The register of the church in which the ceremony took place is the important document, and that can neither be handed over nor destroyed. Krant was giving you withered leaves for your good gold, Pendle. Still, Needs must when Sir Urien drives, so I suppose you agreed to the bribe.'

The bishop's grey head drooped on his breast, his eyes sought the carpet, and he looked like a man overwhelmed with shame. 'Yes,' he replied, in low tones of pain, 'I had not the courage to face the consequences. Indeed, what else could I do? I could not have the man denounce my marriage as a false one, force himself into the presence of my delicate wife, and tell my children that they are nameless. The shock would have killed Amy; it would have broken my children's hearts; it would have shamed me in my high position before the eyes of all England. I was innocent; I am innocent. Yes, but the fact remained, as it remains now, that I am not married to Amy, that my children are not entitled to bear my name. I ask you, Graham—I ask you, what else could I do than pay the money in the face of such shame and disgrace?'

'There is no need to excuse yourself to me, Pendle. I do not blame you in the least.'

'But I blame myself—in part,' replied the bishop, sadly. 'As an honest man I knew that my marriage was illegal; as a priest I was bound to put away the woman who was not—who is not my wife. But think of the shame to her, of the disgrace to my innocent children. I could not do it, Graham, I could not do it. Satan came to me in such a guise that I yielded to his tempting without a struggle. I agreed to buy Jentham's silence at his own price; and as I did not wish him to come here again, lest Amy should see him, I made an appointment to meet him on Southberry Heath on Sunday night, and there paid him his two hundred pounds blackmail.'

'Did you speak with him on the spot where his corpse was afterwards found?' asked Graham, in a low voice, not daring to look at his friend.

'No,' answered the bishop, simply, not suspecting that the doctor hinted at the murder; 'I met him at the Cross-Roads.'

'You had the money with you, I suppose?'

'I had the money in notes of tens. As I was unwilling to draw so large a sum from the Beaminster Bank, lest my doing so should provoke comment, I made a special journey to London and obtained the money there.'

'I think you were over-careful, bishop.'

Graham, I tell you I was overcome with fear, not so much for myself as for those dear to me. You know how the most secret things become known in this city; and I dreaded lest my action should become public property, and should be connected in some way with Jentham. Why, I even tore the butt of the cheque I drew out of the book, lest any record should remain likely to excite suspicion. I took the most elaborate precautions to guard against discoveries.'

'And rather unnecessary ones,' rejoined Graham, dryly. 'Well, and you met the scamp?'

'I did, on Sunday night—that Sunday I was at Southberry holding a confirmation service, and as I rode back, shortly after eight in the evening, I met Jentham, by appointment, at the Cross-Roads. It was a stormy and wet night, Graham, and I half thought that he would not come to the rendezvous, but he was there, sure enough, and in no very good temper at his wetting. I did not get off my horse, but handed down the packet of notes, and asked him for the certificate and letters.'

'Which, no doubt, he declined to part with at the last moment.'

'You are right,' said the bishop, mournfully; 'he declared that he would keep the certificate until he received another hundred pounds.'

'The scoundrel! What did you say?'

'What could I say but "Yes"? I was in the man's power. At any cost, if I wanted to save myself and those dear to me, I had to secure the written evidence he possessed. I told him that I had not the extra money with me, but that if he met me in the same place a week later he should have it. I then rode away downcast and wretched. The next day,' concluded the bishop, quietly, 'I heard that my enemy was dead.'

'Murdered,' said Graham, explicitly.

'Murdered, as you say,' rejoined Pendle, tremulously; 'and oh, my friend, I fear that the Cain who slew him now has the certificate in his possession, and holds my secret. What I have suffered with that knowledge, God alone knows. Every day, every hour, I have been expecting a call from the assassin.'

'The deuce you have!' said the doctor, surprised into unbecoming language.

'Yes; he may come and blackmail me also, Graham!'

'Not when he runs the risk of being hanged, my friend.'

'But you forget,' said the bishop, with a sigh. 'He may trust to his knowledge of my secret to force me to conceal his sin.'

'Would you be coerced in that way?'

Dr Pendle threw back his noble head, and, looking intently at his friend, replied in a firm and unfaltering tone. 'No,' said he, gravely. 'Even at the cost of my secret becoming known, I should have the man arrested.'

'Well,' said Graham, with a shrug, 'you are more of a hero than I am, bishop. The cost of exposing the wretch seems too great.'

'Graham! Graham! I must do what is right at all hazards.'

'Fiat justitia ruat cœlum!' muttered the doctor, 'there is a morsel of dictionary Latin for you. The heavens above your family will certainly fall if you speak out.'

The bishop winced and whitened. 'It is a heavy burden, Graham, a heavy, heavy burden, but God will give me strength to bear it. He will save me according to His mercy.'

The little doctor looked meditatively at his boots. He wished to tell Pendle that the chaplain suspected him of the murder, and that Baltic, the missionary, had been brought to Beaminster to prove such suspicions, but at the present moment he did not see how he could conveniently introduce the information. Moreover, the bishop seemed to be so utterly unconscious that anyone could accuse him of the crime, that Graham shrank from being the busybody to enlighten him. Yet it was necessary that he should be informed, if only that he might be placed on his guard against the machinations of Cargrim. Of course, the doctor never for one moment thought of his respected friend as the author of a deed of violence, and quite believed his account of the meeting with Jentham. The bishop's simple way of relating the episode would have convinced any liberal-minded man of his innocence and rectitude. His accents, and looks, and candour all carried conviction.

Finally Graham hit upon a method of leading up to the subject of Cargrim's treachery, by referring to the old gipsy and her fortunetelling at Mrs Pansey's garden-party. 'What does Mother Jael know of your secret?' he asked with some hesitation.

'Nothing!' replied the bishop, promptly; 'it is impossible that she can know anything, unless—here he paused—unless she is aware of who killed Jentham, and has seen the certificate and letters!'

'Do you think she knows who murdered the man?'

'I—cannot—say. At that garden-party I went into the tent to humour some ladies who wished me to have my fortune told.'

'I saw you go in, bishop; and you came out looking disturbed.'

'No wonder, Graham; for Mother Jael, under the pretence of reading my hand, hinted at my secret. I fancied, from what she said, that she knew what it was; and I accused her of having gained the information from Jentharn's assassin. However, she would not speak plainly, but warned me of coming trouble, and talked about blood and the grave, until I really believed she fancied I had killed the man. I could make nothing of her, so I left the tent considerably discomposed, as you may guess. I intended to see her on another occasion, but as yet I have not done so.'

'Is it your belief that the woman knows your secret?' asked Graham.

'No. On consideration, I concluded that she knew a little, but not much—at all events, not sufficient to hurt me in any way. Krant—that is Jentharn—was of gipsy blood, and I fancied that he had seen Mother Jael, and perhaps, in his boastful way, had hinted at his power over me. Still, I am quite certain that, for his own sake, he did not reveal my secret. And after all, Graham, the allusions of Mother Jael were vague and unsatisfactory, although they disturbed me sufficiently to make me anxious for the moment.'

'Well, bishop, I agree with you. Mother Jael cannot know much or she would have spoken plainer. So far as she is concerned, I fancy your secret is pretty safe; but,' added Graham, with a glance at the door, 'what about Cargrim?'

'He knows nothing, Graham.'

'Perhaps not, but he suspects much.'

'Suspects!' echoed the bishop, in scared tones. 'What can he suspect?'

'That you killed Jentharn,' said Graham, quietly.

Dr Pendle looked incredulously at his friend. 'I—I—murder—I kill—what—Cargrim—says,' he stammered; then asked him with a sharp rush of speech, 'Is the man mad?'

'No; but he is a scoundrel, as I told you. Listen, bishop,' and in his rapid way Graham reported to Dr Pendle all that Harry Brace had told him regarding Cargrim and his schemes.

The bishop listened in incredulous silence; but, almost against his will, he was obliged to believe in Graham's story. That a man whom he trusted, whom he had treated with such kindness, should have dug this pit for him to fall into, was almost beyond belief; and when the truth of the accusation was forced upon him, he hardly knew what to say about so great a traitor. But he made up his mind to one thing. 'I shall dismiss him at once!' he said determinedly.

'No, bishop. It is unwise to drive a rat into a corner; and Cargrim may prove himself dangerous if sharply treated. Better tolerate his presence until Baltic discovers the real criminal.'

'I don't like the position,' said the bishop, frowning.

'No man would. However, it is better to temporise than to risk all and lose all. Better let him remain, Pendle.'

'Very well, Graham, I shall take your advice.'

'Good!' Graham rose to depart. 'And Gabriel?' he asked, with his hand on the door.

'Send him to me, doctor. I must speak to him.'

'You won't scold him for seeing me first, I hope.'

'Scold him,' said the bishop, with a melancholy smile. 'Alas, my friend, the situation is too serious for scolding!'

CHAPTER XXXI

MR BALTIC ON THE TRAIL

WHAT took place at the interview between Gabriel and his father, Dr Graham never knew; and indeed never sought to know. He was a discreet man even for a doctor, and meddled with no one's business, unless—as in the present instance—forced to do so. But even then his discretion showed itself; for after advising the bishop to tolerate the presence of Cargrim until Baltic had solved the riddle he was set to guess, and after sending Gabriel to the palace, he abstained from further inquiries and discussions in connection with murder and secret. He had every faith in Baltic, and quite believed that in time the missionary would lay his hand on the actual murderer. When this was accomplished, and Cargrim's attempt to gain illegal power over Pendle was thwarted; then—all chance of a public scandal being at an end—would be the moment to consider how the bishop should act in reference to his false marriage. Certainly there was the possible danger that the criminal might learn the secret from the certificate and papers, and might reveal it when captured; but Graham thought it best to ignore this difficulty until it should actually arise. For, after all, such a contingency might not occur.

The certificate of marriage between Krant and his wife will reveal nothing to a man unacquainted with Mrs Pendle's previous name; and without such knowledge he cannot know that she married the bishop while her first husband was alive. Certainly she might have mentioned Pendle's name in the letters, but she would not write of him as a lover or as a possible husband; therefore, unless the assassin knows something of the story, which is improbable, and unless he can connect the name of Mrs Krant with Mrs Pendle—which on the face of it is impossible—I do not see how he is to learn the truth. He may guess, or he may

know for certain, that Jentham received the two hundred pounds from the bishop, but he cannot guess that the price was paid for certificate and letters, especially as he found them on the body, and knows that they were not handed over for the money. No; on the whole, I think Pendle is mistaken; in my opinion there is no danger to be feared from the assassin, whomsoever he may be.'

In this way Graham argued with himself, and shortly came to the comfortable conclusion that Dr Pendle's secret would never become a public scandal. Now that Jentham, *alias* Krant, was dead, the secret was known to three people only—namely, to the bishop, to himself, and to Gabriel. If none of the three betrayed it—and they had the strongest reason for silence—no one else would, or could. The question of the murder was the immediate matter for consideration; and once Dr Pendle's innocence was proved by the capture of the real assassin, Cargrim could be dismissed in well-merited disgrace. With all the will in the world he could not then harm the bishop, seeing that he was ignorant of the dead man's relation to Mrs Pendle. Other danger there was none; of that the little doctor was absolutely assured.

Perhaps the bishop argued in this way also; or it may be he found a certain amount of relief in sharing his troubles with Gabriel and Graham; but he certainly appeared more cheerful and less worried than formerly, and even tolerated the society of Cargrim with equanimity, although he detested playing a part so foreign to his frank and honourable nature. However, he saw the necessity of masking his dislike until the sting of this domestic viper could be rendered innocuous, and was sufficiently gracious on such occasions as he came into contact with him. Gabriel was less called upon to be courteous to the schemer, as, having come to a complete understanding with his father, he rarely visited the palace; but when he did so his demeanour towards Mr Cargrim was much the same as of yore. For the good of their domestic peace, both father and son concealed their real feelings, and succeeded as creditably as was possible with men of their honourable natures. But they were not cunning enough—or perhaps sufficiently guarded—to deceive the artful chaplain. Evil himself, he was always on the alert to see evil in others.

'I wonder what all this means,' he ruminated one day after vainly attempting to learn why Gabriel had returned so unexpectedly to Beormminster. 'The bishop seems unnecessarily polite, and young Pendle appears to be careful how he speaks. They surely can't suspect me of knowing about the murder. Perhaps Baltic has been talking; I'll just give him a word of warning.'

This he did, and was promptly told by the ex-sailor not to advise on points of

which he was ignorant. 'I know my business, sir, none better,' observed Baltic, in his solemn way, 'and there are few men who are more aware of the value of a silent tongue.'

'You may be an admirable detective, as you say,' retorted Cargrim, nettled by the rebuke, 'but I have only your word for it; and you will permit me to observe that I have not yet seen a proof of your capabilities.'

'All in good time, Mr Cargrim. More haste less speed, sir. I fancy I am on the right track at last.'

'Can you guess who killed the man?' asked the chaplain, eagerly waiting for the bishop's name to be pronounced.

'I never guess, sir. I theorise from external evidence, and then try, with such brains as God has given me, to prove my theories.'

'You have gained some evidence, then?'

'If I have, Mr Cargrim, you'll hear it when I place the murderer in the dock. It is foolish to show half-finished work.'

'But if the mur—'

'Hold hard, sir!' interrupted Baltic, raising his head. 'I'll so far depart from my rule as to tell you one thing—whosoever killed Jentham, it was not Bishop Pendle.'

Cargrim grew red and angry. 'I tell you it was!' he almost shouted, although this conversation took place in a quiet corner near the cathedral, and thereby required prudent speech and demeanour. 'Didn't Dr Pendle meet Jentham on the common?'

'We presume so, sir, but as yet we have no proof of the meeting.'

'At least you know that he paid Jentham two hundred pounds.'

'Perhaps he did; maybe he didn't,' returned Baltic, quietly. 'He certainly drew out that amount from the Ophir Bank, but, not having traced the notes, I can't say if he paid it to the man.'

'But I am sure he did,' insisted Cargrim, still angry.

'In that case, sir, why ask me for my opinion?' replied the imperturbable Baltic.

If Mr Cargrim had not been a clergyman, he would have sworn at the complacent demeanour of the agent, and even as it was he felt inclined to risk a relieving oath or two. But knowing Baltic's religious temperament, he was wise enough not to lay himself open to further rebuke; so he turned the matter off with a laugh, and observed that no doubt Mr Baltic knew his own business best.

'I think I can safely say so, sir,' rejoined Baltic, gravely. 'By the way, did you not tell me that Captain George Pendle was on the common when the murder took place?'

'Yes, George was there, and so was Gabriel, Mrs Pansey's page saw them both.'

'And where is Captain Pendle now, sir?'

'At Wincaster with his regiment; but the bishop has sent for him to come to Beorminster, so I expect he will be here within the week.'

'I am glad of that, Mr Cargrim, as I wish to ask Captain Pendle a few questions.'

'Do you suspect him?'

'I can't rightly say, sir,' answered Baltic, wiping his face with the red bandanna. 'Later on I may form an opinion. Mr Gabriel Pendle comes to The Derby Winner sometimes I see.'

'Yes; he is in love with the barmaid there.'

Baltic looked up sharply. 'Mosk's daughter, sir?'

'The same. He wants to marry Bell Mosk.'

'Does—he—indeed?' drawled the agent, flicking his thumb nail against his teeth. 'Well, Mr Cargrim, he might do worse. There is a lot of good in that young woman, sir. Mr Gabriel Pendle has lately returned from abroad, I hear.'

'Yes, from Nauheim.'

'That is in Germany, I take it, sir. Did he travel on a Cook's ticket, do you know?'

'I believe he did.'

'Oh! humph! I'll say good-bye, then, Mr Cargrim, for the present. I shall see you when I return from London.'

'Are you going to ask about Gabriel's ticket at Cook's?'

'There's no telling, sir. I may look in.'

'Do you think that Gab—'

'I think nothing as yet, Mr Cargrim; when I do, I'll tell you my thoughts. Good-day, sir! God bless you!' And Baltic, with a satisfied expression on his face, rolled away in a nautical manner.

'God bless me indeed!' muttered Cargrim, in much displeasure, for neither the speech nor the manner of the man pleased him. 'Ugh! I wish Baltic would stick to either religion or business. At present he is a kind of moral hermaphrodite, good for neither one thing nor another. I wonder if he suspects the bishop or his two sons? I don't believe Dr Pendle is innocent; but if he is, either George or Gabriel is guilty. Well, if that is so, I'll still be able to make the bishop give me Heathcroft. He will rather do that than see one of his sons hanged and the name disgraced. Still, I hope Baltic will bring home the crime to his lordship.'

With this amiable wish, Mr Cargrim quickened his pace to catch up with Miss Whichello, whom he saw tripping across the square towards the Jenny Wren house. The little old lady looked rosy and complacent, at peace with herself and the whole of Beorminster. Nevertheless, her expression changed when she saw Mr Cargrim sliding gracefully towards her, and she received him with marked coldness. As yet she had not forgiven him for his unauthorised interference on behalf of Mrs Pansey. Cargrim was quick to observe

her buckram civility, but diplomatically took no notice of its frigidity. On the contrary, he was more gushing and more expansive than ever.

'A happy meeting, my dear lady,' he said, with a beaming glance. 'Had I not met you, I should have called to see you as the bearer of good news.'

'Really!' replied Miss Whichello, drily. 'That will be a relief from hearing bad news, Mr Cargrim. I have had sufficient trouble of late.'

'Ah!' sighed the chaplain, falling into his professional drawl, 'how true is the saying of Job, "Man is born—"

'I don't want to hear about Job,' interrupted Miss Whichello, crossly. 'He is the greatest bore of all the patriarchs.'

'Job, dear lady, was not a patriarch.'

'Nevertheless, he is a bore, Mr Cargrim. What is your good news?'

'Captain Pendle is coming to Beorminster this week, Miss Whichello.'

'Oh,' said the little old lady, with a satirical smile, 'you are a day after the fair, Mr Cargrim. I heard that news this morning.'

'Indeed! But the bishop only sent for Captain Pendle yesterday.'

'Quite so; and Miss Arden received a telegram from Captain Pendle this morning.'

'Ah! Miss Whichello, young love! young love!'

The little lady could have shaken Cargrim for the smirk with which he made this remark. However, she restrained her very natural impulse, and merely remarked—rather irrelevantly, it must be confessed—that if two young and handsome people in love with one another were not happy in their first blush of passion they never would be.

'No doubt, dear lady. I only trust that such happiness may last. But there is no sky without a cloud.'

'And there is no bee without a sting, and no rose without a thorn. I know all those consoling proverbs, Mr Cargrim, but they don't apply to my turtle-doves.'

Cargrim rubbed his hands softly together. 'Long may you continue to think so, my dear lady,' said he, with a sad look.

'What do you mean, sir?' asked Miss Whichello, sharply.

'I mean that it is as well to be prepared for the worst,' said Cargrim, in his bldest manner. 'The course of true love—but you are weary of such trite sayings. Good-day, Miss Whichello!' He raised his hat and turned away. 'One last proverb—Joy in the morning means grief at night.'

When Mr Cargrim walked away briskly after delivering this Parthian shaft, Miss Whichello stood looking after him with an expression of nervous worry on her rosy face. She had her own reasons to apprehend trouble in connection with the engagement, and although these were unknown to the chaplain,

his chance arrow had hit the mark. The thoughts of the little old lady at once reverted to the conversation with the bishop at the garden-party.

'Mrs Pansey again,' thought Miss Whichello, resuming her walk at a slower pace. 'I shall have to call on her, and appeal either to her fears or her charity, otherwise she may cause trouble.'

In the meantime, Mr Baltic, proceeding in his grave way towards Eastgate, had fallen in with Gabriel coming from The Derby Winner. As yet the two had never met, and save the name, young Pendle knew nothing about the ex-sailor. Nevertheless, when face to face with him, he recognised the man at once as a private inquiry agent whom he had once spoken to in Whitechapel. The knowledge of his father's secret, of Jenthamp's murder and of this stranger's profession mingled confusedly in Gabriel's head, and his heart knocked at his ribs for very fear.

'I met you in London some years ago,' he said nervously.

'Yes, Mr Pendle; but then I did not know your name, nor did you know mine.'

'How did you recognise me?' asked Gabriel.

'I have a good memory for faces, sir,' returned Baltic, 'but, as a matter of fact, Sir Harry Brace pointed you out to me.'

'Sir Har—oh, then you are Baltic!'

'At your service, Mr Pendle. I am down here on business.'

'I know all about it,' replied Gabriel, recovering his nerve with the knowledge of the man's name and inclination to side with the bishop.

'Indeed, sir! And who told you about it?'

'Sir Harry told Dr Graham, who informed my father, who spoke to me.'

'Oh!' Baltic looked seriously at the curate's pale face. 'Then the bishop knows that I am an inquiry agent.'

'He does, Mr Baltic. And, to tell you the truth, he is not at all pleased that you presented yourself in our city as a missionary.'

'I am a missionary,' answered the ex-sailor, quietly. 'I explained as much to Sir Harry, but it would seem that he has told the worst and kept back the best.'

'I don't understand,' said the curate, much bewildered.

'Sir, it would take too long for me to explain why I call myself a missionary, but you can rest assured that I am not sailing under false colours. As it is, you know me as an agent; and you know also my purpose in coming here.'

'Yes! I know that you are investigating the mur—'

'We are in the street, sir,' interrupted Baltic, with a glance at passers-by; 'it is as well to be discreet. One moment.' He led Gabriel into a quiet alley, comparatively

free from listeners. 'This is a rather rough sort of neighbourhood, sir.'

'Rough certainly, but not dangerous,' replied Gabriel, puzzled by the remark.

'Don't you carry a pistol, Mr Pendle?'

'No! Why should I?'

'Why indeed? If the Gospel is not a protection enough, no earthly arms will prevail. Your name is Gabriel, I think, sir.'

'Yes! Gabriel Pendle; but I don't see—'

'I'm coming to an explanation, sir. G. P.' mused Baltic — 'same initials as those of your father and brother, eh, Mr Pendle?'

'Certainly. Both the bishop and my brother are named George.'

'G. P. all three,' said Baltic, with a nod.

'Do you travel abroad with a Cook's ticket, sir?'

'Usually! Why do you—'

'A through ticket to — say Nauheim—is about three pounds, I believe?'

'I paid that for mine, Mr Baltic. May I ask why you question me in this manner?' demanded Gabriel, irritably.

Baltic tapped Gabriel's chest three times with his fore-finger. 'For your own safety, Mr Pendle. Good-day, sir!'

CHAPTER XXXII

THE INITIALS

As has before been stated, Dr Graham had another conversation with his persecuted friend, in which he advised him to tolerate the presence of Cargrim until Baltic captured the actual criminal. It was also at this second interview that the bishop asked Graham if he should tell George the truth. This question the little doctor answered promptly in the negative.

'For what is the use of telling him?' said he, argumentatively; 'doing so will make you uncomfortable and George very unhappy.'

'But George must learn the truth sooner or later.'

'I don't see that it is necessary to inform him of it at all,' retorted Graham, obstinately, 'and at all events you need not explain until forced to do so. One thing at a time, bishop. At present your task is to baffle Cargrim and kick the scoundrel out of the house when the murderer is found. Then we can discuss the matter of the marriage with Mrs Pendle.'

'Graham!' — the bishop's utterance of the name was like a cry of pain — 'I cannot — I dare not tell Amy!'

'You must, Pendle, since she is the principal person concerned in the matter. You know how Gabriel learned the truth

from her casual description of her first husband. Well, when Mrs Pendle returns to Beaminster, she may—I don't say that she will, mind you—but she may speak of Krant again, since, so far as she is concerned, there is no need for her to keep the fact of her first marriage secret.'

'Except that she may not wish to recall unhappy days,' put in the bishop, softly. 'Indeed, I wonder that Amy could bring herself to speak of Krant to her son and mine.'

'Women, my friend, do and say things at which they wonder themselves,' said the misogynist, cynically; 'probably Mrs Pendle acted on the impulse of the moment and regretted it immediately the words were out of her mouth. Still, she may describe Krant again when she comes back, and her listener may be as clever as Gabriel was in putting two and two together, and connecting your wife's first husband with Krant. Should such a thing occur—and it might occur—your secret would become the common property of this scandalmongering place, and your last condition would be worse than your first. Also,' continued Graham, with the air of a person clinching an argument, 'if you and Mrs Pendle are to part, my poor friend, she must be told the reason for such separation.'

'Part!' echoed the bishop, indignantly. 'My dear Amy and I shall never part, doctor. I wonder that you can suggest such a thing. Now that Krant is dead beyond all doubt, I shall marry his widow at once.'

'Quite so, and quite right,' assented Graham, emphatically; 'but in that case, as you can see for yourself, you must tell her that the first marriage is null and void, so as to account for the necessity of the second ceremony.' The doctor paused and reflected. 'Old scatterbrain that I am,' said he, with a shrug, 'I quite forgot that way out of the difficulty. A second marriage! Of course! and there is your riddle solved.'

'No doubt, so far as Amy and I are concerned,' said Pendle, gloomily, 'but so late a ceremony will not make my children legitimate. In England, marriage is not a retrospective act.'

'They manage these things better in France,' opined Graham, in the manner of Sterne; 'there a man can legitimise his children born out of wedlock if he so chooses. There was a talk of modifying the English Act in the same way; but, of course, the very nice people with nasty ideas shrieked out in their usual pig-headed style about legalised immorality. However,' pursued the doctor, in a more cheerful tone, 'I do not see that you need worry yourself on that point, bishop. You can depend upon Gabriel and me holding our tongues; you need not tell Lucy or George, and when you marry your wife for the second time, all things can go on as before. "What the eye does

not see, the heart does not grieve at," you know.'

'But my eye sees, and my heart grieves,' groaned the bishop.

'Pish! don't make an inquisition of your conscience, Pendle. You have done no wrong; like greatness, evil has been thrust upon you.'

'I am certainly an innocent sinner, Graham.'

'Of course you are; but now that we have found the remedy, that is all over and done with. Wait till Jentham's murderer is found, then turn Cargrim out of doors, marry Mrs Krant in some out-of-the-way parish, and make a fresh will in favour of your children. There you are, bishop! Don't worry any more about the matter.'

'You don't think that I should tell Brace that—?'

'I certainly don't think that you should disgrace your daughter in the eyes of her future husband,' retorted the doctor, hotly: 'marry your wife and hold your tongue. Even the Recording Angel can take no note of so obviously just a course.'

'I think you are right, Graham,' said the bishop, shaking his friend's hand with an expression of relief. 'In justice to my children, I must be silent. I shall act as you suggest.'

'Then that being so, you are a man again,' said Graham, jocularly, 'and now you can send for George to pay you a visit.'

'Do you think there is any necessity, Graham? The sight of him—'

'Will do you good, Pendle. Don't martyriser yourself and look on your children as so many visible evidences of sin. Bosh! I tell you, bosh!' cried the doctor, vigorously if ungallantly. 'Send for George, send for Mrs Pendle and Lucy, and throw all these morbid ideas to the wind. If you do not,' added Graham, raising a threatening finger, 'I shall write out a certificate for the transfer of the cleverest bishop in England to a lunatic asylum.'

'Well, well, I won't risk that,' said the bishop, smiling. 'George shall come back at once.'

'And all will be gas and gaiters, to quote the immortal Boz. Good-day, bishop! I have prescribed your medicine; see that you take it.'

'You are a tonic in yourself, Graham.'

'All men of sense are, Pendle. They are the salt of the earth, the oxygen in the moral atmosphere. If it wasn't for my common sense, bishop,' said the doctor, with a twinkle, 'I believe I should be weak enough to come and hear you preach.'

Dr Pendle laughed. 'I am afraid the age of miracles is past, my friend. As a bishop, I should reprove you, but—'

'But, as a good, sensible fellow, you'll take my advice. Well, well, bishop, I have had

more obstinate patients than my college chum. Good-day, good-day,' and the little doctor skipped out of the library with a gay look and a merry nod, leaving the bishop relieved and smiling, and devoutly thankful for the solution of his life's riddle. At that moment the noble verse of the Psalmist was in his mind and upon his lips—' God is our refuge and our strength : a very present help in trouble.' Bishop Pendle was proving the truth of that text.

So the exiled lover was permitted to return to Beorminster, and very pleased he was to find himself once more in the vicinity of his beloved. After congratulating the bishop on his recovered cheerfulness and placidity, George brought forward the name of Mab, and was pleased to find that his father was by no means so opposed to the match as formerly. Dr Pendle admitted again that Mab was a singularly charming young lady, and that his son might do worse than marry her. Late events had humbled the bishop's pride considerably ; and the knowledge that George was nameless, induced him to consider Miss Arden more favourably as a wife for the young man. She was at least a lady, and not barmaid like Bell Mosk ; so the painful fact of Gabriel setting his heart so low made George's superior choice quite a brilliant match in comparison. On these grounds, the bishop intimated to Captain Pendle that, on consideration, he was disposed to overlook the rumours about Miss Arden's disreputable father and accept her as a daughter-in-law. It was with this joyful news that George, glowing and eager, as a lover should be, made his appearance the next morning at the Jenny Wren house.

' Thank God the bishop is reasonable,' cried Miss Whichello, when George explained the new position. ' I knew that Mab would gain his heart in the end.'

' She gained mine in the beginning,' said Captain George, fondly, ' and that, after all, is the principal thing.'

' What ! your own heart, egotist ! Does mine then count for nothing ?'

' Oh ! ' said George, slipping his arm round her waist, ' if we begin on that subject, my litany will be as long as the Athanasian Creed, and quite as devout.'

' Captain Pendle ! ' exclaimed Miss Whichello, scandalised both by embrace and speech—both rather trying to a religious spinster.

' Miss Whichello,' mimicked the gay lover, ' am I not to be received into the family under the name of George ?'

' That depends on your behaviour, Captain Pendle. But I am both pleased and relieved that the bishop consents to the marriage.'

' Aunty ! ' cried Mab, reddening a trifle, ' don't talk as though it were a favour. I do not look upon myself as worthless, by any means.'

' Worthless ! ' echoed George, gaily ; ' then is gold mere dross, and diamonds but pebbles. You are the beauty of the universe, my darling,

and I your lowest slave.' He threw himself at her feet. ' Set your pretty foot on my neck, my queen ! '

' Captain Pendle,' said Miss Whichello, striving to stifle a laugh, ' if you don't get up and behave properly I shall leave the room.'

' If you do, aunty, he will get worse,' smiled Mab, ruffling what the barber had left of her lover's hair. ' Get up at once, you—you mad Romeo.'

George rose obediently, and dusted his knees. ' Juliet, I obey,' said he, tragically ; ' but no, you are not Juliet of the garden ; you are Cleopatra ! Semiramis ! the most imperious and queenly of women. Where did you get your rich eastern beauty from, Mab ? What are you, an Arabian princess, doing in our cold grey West ? You are like some dark-browed queen ! A daughter of Bohemia ! A Romany sorceress ! '

Mab laughed, but Miss Whichello heaved a quick, impatient sigh, as though these eastern comparisons annoyed her. George was unconsciously making remarks which cut her to the heart ; and almost unable to control her feelings, she muttered some excuse and glided hastily from the room. With the inherent selfishness of love, neither George nor Mab paid any attention to her emotion or departure, but whispered and smiled and caressed one another, well pleased at their sweet solitude. George spent one golden hour in paradise, then unwillingly tore himself away. Only Shakespeare could have done justice to the passion of their parting. Kisses and sighs, last looks, final handclasps, and then George in the sunshine of the square, with Mab waving her handkerchief from the open casement. But, alas ! workaday prose always succeeds Arcadian rhyme, and with the sinking sun dies the glory of the day.

With his mind hanging betwixt a mental heaven and earth, after the similitude of Mahomet's coffin, George walked slowly down the street, until he was brought like a shot eagle to the ground by a touch on the shoulder. Now, as there is nothing more annoying than such a bailiff's salute, George wheeled round with some vigorous language on the tip of his tongue, but did not use it when he found himself facing Sir Harry Brace.

' Oh, it's you ! ' said Captain Pendle, lamely. ' Well, with your experience, you should know better than to pull up a fellow unawares.'

' You talk in riddles, my good George,' said Harry, staring, as well he might, at this not very coherent speech.

' I have just left Miss Arden,' explained George, quite unabashed, for he did not care if the whole world knew of his love.

' Oh, I beg your pardon, I understand,' replied Brace, with a broad smile ; ' but you must excuse me, old chap. I am—I am

out of practice lately, you see. "My love she is in Germanee," as the old song says. I wish to speak with you.'

'All right. Where shall we go?'

'To the club. I must see you privately.'

The Beaminster Club was just a short distance down the street, so George followed Harry into its hospitable portals, and finally accepted a comfortable chair in the smoking-room, which, luckily for the purpose of Brace, was empty at that hour. The two young men each ordered a cool hock-and-soda and lighted two very excellent cigarettes, which came out of the pocket of extravagant George. Then they began to talk, and Harry opened the conversation with a question.

'George,' he said, with a serious look on his usually merry face, 'were you on Southberry Heath on the night that poor devil was murdered?'

'Oh, yes,' replied Captain Pendle, with some wonder at the question. 'I rode over to the gipsy camp to buy a particular ring from Mother Jael.'

'For Miss Arden, I suppose?'

'Yes; I wished for a necromantic symbol of our engagement.'

'Did you hear or see anything of the murder?'

'Good Lord, no!' cried the startled George, sitting up straight. 'I should have been at the inquest had I seen the act, or even heard the shot.'

'Did you carry a pistol with you on that night?'

'As I wasn't riding through Central Africa, I did not. What is the meaning of these mysterious questions?'

Brace answered this query by slipping his hand into his breast-pocket and producing therefrom a neat little pistol, toy-like, but deadly enough in the hand of a good marksman. 'Is this yours?' he asked, holding it out for Captain Pendle's inspection.

'Certainly it is,' said George, handling the weapon; 'here are my initials on the butt. Where did you get this?'

'It was found by Mother Jael near the spot where Jentham was murdered.'

Captain Pendle clapped down the pistol on the table with an ejaculation of amazement. 'Was he shot with this, Harry?'

'Without doubt!' replied Brace, gravely. 'Therefore, as it is your property, I wish to know how it came to be used for that purpose.'

'Great Scott, Brace! you don't think that I killed the blackguard?'

'I think nothing so ridiculous,' protested Sir Harry, testily.

'You talk as if you did, though,' retorted George, smartly. 'I thrashed that Jentham beast for insulting Mab, but I didn't shoot him.'

'But the pistol is yours.'

'I admit that, but—Good Lord!' cried Captain Pendle, starting to his feet.

'What now?' asked Brace, turning pale and cold on the instant.

'Gabriel! Gabriel! I—I gave this pistol to him.'

'You gave this pistol to Gabriel? When? Where?'

'In London,' explained George, rapidly. 'When he was in Whitechapel I knew that he went among a lot of roughs and thieves, so I insisted that he should carry this pistol for his protection. He was unwilling to do so at first, but in the end I persuaded him to slip it into his pocket. I have not seen it from that day to this.'

'And it was found near Jentham's corpse,' said Brace, with a groan.

The two young men looked at one another in horrified silence, the same thoughts in the mind of each. The pistol had been in the possession of Gabriel; and Gabriel on the night of the murder had been in the vicinity of the crime.

'It—it is impossible,' whispered George, almost inaudibly. 'Gabriel can explain.'

'Gabriel must explain,' said Brace, firmly; 'it is a matter of life and death!'

CHAPTER XXXIII

MR BALTIC EXPLAINS HIMSELF

IT was Miss Whichello, who, on the statement of Mrs Pansey as reported by Mr Cargrim, had told George of his brother's presence on Southberry Heath at the time of Jentham's murder. She had casually mentioned the fact during an idle conversation; but never for one moment had she dreamed of connecting Gabriel with so atrocious a crime. Nor indeed did Captain Pendle, until the fact was rudely and unexpectedly brought home to him by the production of the pistol. Nevertheless, despite this material evidence, he vehemently refused to credit that so gentle a being as Gabriel had slain a fellow-creature deliberately and in cold blood, particularly as on the face of it no reason could be assigned for so hazardous an act. The curate, in his loyal brother's opinion, was neither a vindictive fool nor an aimless murderer.

With this latter opinion Sir Harry very heartily agreed. He had the highest respect for Gabriel as a man and a priest, and could not believe that he had wantonly committed a brutal crime, so repulsive to his benign nature, so contrary to the purity and teachings of his life. He was quite satisfied that the young man both could, and would, explain how the pistol had passed out of his possession; but he did

not seek the explanation himself. Baltic, previous to his departure for London, had made Brace promise to question Captain Pendle about the pistol, and report to him the result of such conversation. Now that the pistol was proved to have been in the keeping of Gabriel, the baronet knew very well that Baltic would prefer to question so important a witness himself. Therefore, while waiting for the agent's return, he not only himself refrained from seeing Gabriel, but persuaded George not to do so.

'Your questions will only do more harm than good!' expostulated Brace, 'as you have neither the trained capacity nor the experience to examine into the matter. Baltic returns to-morrow, and as I have every faith in his judgment and discretion, it will be much better to let him handle it.'

'Who is this Baltic you talk of so much?' asked the captain, impatiently.

'He is a private inquiry agent who is trying to discover the man who killed Jentham.'

'On behalf of Tinkler, I suppose?'

'He is working with Tinkler in the matter,' replied Brace, evasively, for he did not want to inform George, the rash and fiery, of his father's peril and Cargrim's treachery.

'Baltic is a London detective, no doubt?'

'Yes, his brains are more equal than Tinkler's to the task of solving the riddle.'

'He won't arrest Gabriel, I hope,' said George, anxiously.

'Not unless he is absolutely certain that Gabriel committed the crime; and I am satisfied that he will never arrive at that certainty.'

'I—should—think—not,' cried Captain Pendle, with disdain. 'Gabriel, poor boy, would not kill a fly, let alone a man. Still, these legal bloodhounds are coarse and unscrupulous.'

'Baltic is not, George. He is quite a new type of detective, and works rather from a religious than a judicial point of view.'

'I never heard of a religious detective before,' remarked George, scornfully.

'Nor I; it is a new departure, and I am not sure but that it is a good one, incongruous as it may seem.'

'Is the man a hypocrite?'

'By no means. He is thoroughly in earnest. Here, in public, he calls himself a missionary.'

'Oh! oh! the wolf in the skin of a sheep!'

'Not at all. The man is—well, it is no use my explaining, as you will see him shortly, and then can judge for yourself. But if you will take my advice, George, you will let Baltic figure the matter out on his own slate, as the Americans say. Don't mention his name or actual business to any-

one. Believe me, I know what I am talking about.'

'Very well,' grumbled George, convinced by Harry's earnestness, but by no means pleased to be condemned to an interval of ignorance and inactivity. 'I shall hold my tongue and close my eyes. But you agree with me that Gabriel did not kill the brute?'

'Of course! From the first I never had any doubts on that score.'

Here for the time being the conversation ended, and George went his way to play the part of a careless onlooker. But for his promise, he would have warned Gabriel of the danger which threatened him, and probably have complicated matters by premature anger. Luckily for all things, his faith in Brace's good sense was strong enough to deter him from so rash and headlong a course; therefore, at home and abroad, he assumed a gaiety he did not feel. So here in the episcopal palace of Beorminster were three people, each one masking his real feelings in intercourse with the others. The bishop, his son and his scheming chaplain were actors in a comedy of life which—in the opinion of the last—might easily end up as a tragedy. No wonder their behaviour was constrained, no wonder they avoided one another. They were as men living over a powder magazine which the least spark would explode with thunderous noise and damaging effect.

Baltic was the *deus ex machina* to strike the spark for ignition, but he seemed in no hurry to do so. Punctual to his promise he returned to Beorminster, and heard Sir Harry's report about the pistol with grave attention. Without venturing an opinion for or against the curate, he asked Sir Harry to preserve a strict silence until such time as he gave him leave to speak, and afterwards took his way to Gabriel's lodgings in the lower part of the town. There he was fortunate enough to find young Pendle within doors, and after a lengthy interview with him on matters connected with the crime, he again sought the baronet. A detailed explanation to that gentleman resulted in a visit of both to Sir Harry's bank, and an interesting conversation with its manager. When Brace and Baltic finally found themselves on the pavement, the face of the first wore an expression of exultation, while the latter, in his reticent way, looked soberly satisfied. Both had every reason for these signs of triumph, for they had touched the highest pinnacle of success.

'I suppose there can be no doubt about it, Baltic?'

'None whatever, Sir Harry. Every link in the chain of evidence is complete.'

'You are a wonderful man, Baltic; you have scored off that fool of a Tinkler in a very neat way.'

'The inspector is no fool in his own sphere,

sir,' reproved the serious ex-sailor, 'but this case happened to be beyond it.'

'And beyond him also,' chuckled the baronet.

'There is no denying that, Sir Harry. However, the man is useful in his own place, and having done my part, I shall now ask him to do his.'

'What is his task, eh?'

'To procure a warrant on my evidence. The man must be arrested this afternoon.'

'And then, Baltic?'

'Then, sir,' said the man, solemnly, 'I shall be no longer an agent, but a missionary; and in my own poor way I shall strive to bring him to repentance.'

'After bringing him to the gallows. A queer way of inducing good, Baltic.'

'Whoso loseth all gaineth all,' quoted Baltic, in all earnestness; 'my mission is not to destroy souls but to save them.'

'Humph! you destroy the material part for the salvation of the spiritual. A man called Torquemada conducted his religious crusade in the same way some hundreds of years ago, and has been cursed for his system by humanity ever since. Your morality—or rather I should say your religiosity—is beyond me, Baltic.'

'*Magnas veritas et praevalebit!*' misquoted Baltic, solemnly, and, touching his hat roughly, turned away to finish the work he felt himself called upon by his religious convictions to execute.

Harry looked after him with a satirical smile. 'You filched that morsel of dog Latin out of the end of the English dictionary, my friend,' he thought, 'and your untutored mind does not apply it with particular relevancy. But I see that, like all fanatics, you distort texts and sayings into fitting your own peculiar views. Well, well, the ends you aim at are right enough, no doubt, but your method of reaching them is as queer a one as ever came under my notice. Go your ways, Torquemada Baltic, there are the germs of a mighty intolerant sect in your kind of teaching, I fear,' and in his turn Sir Harry went about his own affairs.

Inspector Tinkler, more purple-faced and important than ever, sat in his private office, twirling his thumbs and nodding his head for lack of business on which to employ his mighty mind. The afternoon, by some freak of the sun which had to do with his solar majesty's unusual spotty complexion, was exceptionally hot for a late September day, and the heat made Mr Inspector drowsy and indolent. He might have fallen into the condition of an official sleeping beauty, but that a sharp knock at the door roused him sufficiently to bid the knocker enter, whereupon a well-fed policeman presented himself with the information—delivered in a sleepy, beefy voice—that Mr Baltic wished to see Mr Tinkler. The name acted like a douche

of iced water on the inspector, and he sharply ordered the visitor to be admitted at once. In another minute Baltic was in the office, saluting the head of the Beaminster police in his usual grave style.

'Ha, Mr Baltic, sir!' rasped out Tinkler, in his parade voice, 'I am glad to see you. There is a seat, and here am I; both at your service.'

'Thank you, Mr Inspector,' said Baltic, and, taking a seat, carefully covered his knees with the red bandanna, and adjusted his straw hat on top of it according to custom.

'Well, sir, well,' grunted Mr Inspector, pompously, 'and how does your little affair get on?'

'It has got on so far, sir, that I have come to ask you for a warrant of arrest.'

'By George! eh! what! Have you found him?' roared Tinkler, starting back with an incredulous look.

'I have discovered the man who murdered Jentham! Yes.'

'Good!' snapped Tinkler, trying to conceal his amazement by a reversion to his abrupt military manner. 'His name?'

'I'll tell you that when I have related my evidence incriminating him. It is as well to be orderly, Mr Inspector.'

'Certainly, Mr Baltic, sir. Order is at the base of all discipline.'

'I should rather say that discipline is the basis of order,' returned Baltic, with a dry smile; 'however, we can discuss that question later. At present I shall detail my evidence against—Mr Inspector leaned eagerly forward—'against the man who killed Jentham.' Mr Inspector threw himself back with a disappointed snort.

'Tention!' threw out Tinkler, and arranged pen and ink and paper to take notes. 'Now, Mr Baltic, sir!'

'My knowledge of the man Jentham,' droned Baltic, in his monotonous voice, 'begins at the moment I was informed by Mr Cargrim that he called at the palace to see Bishop Pendle a few days before he met with his violent end. It would appear—although of this I am not absolutely certain—that the bishop knew Jentham when he occupied a more respectable position and answered to another name!'

'Memorandum,' wrote down Tinkler, 'to inquire if his lordship can supply information regarding the past of the so-called Jentham.'

'The bishop,' continued the narrator, with a covert smile at Tinkler's unnecessary scribbling, 'was apparently sorry to see an old friend in a homeless and penniless condition, for to help him on in the world he gave him the sum of two hundred pounds.'

'That,' declared Tinkler, throwing down his pen, 'is charity gone mad—if—he emphasised the word—if, mark me, it is true.'

'If it were not true I should not state it,

rejoined Baltic, gravely. 'As a Christian I have a great regard for the truth. Bishop Pendle drew that sum out of his London account in twenty ten-pound notes. I have the numbers of those notes, and I traced several to the possession of the assassin, who must have taken them from the corpse. On these grounds, Mr Inspector, I assert that Dr Pendle gave Jenthiam two hundred pounds.'

Tinkler again took up his pen. 'Memo,' he set down, 'to ask his lordship if he helped the so-called Jenthiam with money. If so, how much?'

'As you know,' resumed Baltic, with deliberation, 'Jenthiam was shot through the heart, but the pistol could not be found. It is now in my possession, and I obtained it from Mother Jael!'

'What! did she kill the poor devil?'

'I have already said that the murderer is a man, Mr Inspector. Mother Jael knows nothing about the crime, save that she heard the shot and afterwards picked up the pistol near the corpse. I obtained it from her with considerable ease!'

'By threatening her with the warrant I gave you, no doubt.'

Baltic shook his head. 'I made no mention of the warrant, nor did I produce it,' he replied, 'but I happen to know something of the Romany tongue, and be what the Spaniards call "*afecido*" to the gipsics. When Mother Jael was convinced that I was a brother of tent and road, she gave me the pistol without ado. It is best to work by kindness, Mr Inspector.'

'We can't all be gipsies, Mr Baltic, sir. Procccd! What about the pistol?'

'The pistol,' continued Baltic, passing over the envious sneer, 'had a silver plate on the butt, inscribed with the letters "G. P." I did not know if the weapon belonged to Bishop George Pendle, Captain George Pendle, or to Mr Gabriel Pendle.'

Inspector Tinkler looked up aghast. 'By Jupiter! sir, you don't mean to tell me that you suspected the bishop? Damme, Mr Baltic, how dare you?'

Now the missionary was not going to confide in this official thick-head regarding Cargrim's suspicions of the bishop, which had led him to connect the pistol with the prelate; so he evaded the difficulty by explaining that as the lent money was a link between the bishop and Jenthiam, and the initials on the pistol were those of his lordship, he naturally fancied that the weapon belonged to Dr Pendle, 'although I will not go so far as to say that I suspected him,' finished Baltic, smoothly.

'I should think not!' growled Tinkler, wrathfully. 'Bishops don't murder tramps in England, whatever they may do in the South Seas!' and he made a third note, 'Memo.—To ask his lordship if he lost a pistol.'

'As Captain George Pendle is a soldier, Mr Inspector, I fancied—on the testimony of the initials—that the pistol might belong to him. On putting the question to him, it appeared that the weapon was his property—'

'The devil!'

'But that he had lent it to Mr Gabriel Pendle to protect himself from roughs when that young gentleman was a curate in White-chapel, London.'

'Well, I'm — d — blessed!' ejaculated Tinkler, with staring eyes; 'so Mr Gabriel killed Jenthiam!'

'Don't jump to conclusions, Mr Inspector. Gabriel Pendle is innocent. I never thought that he was guilty, but I fancied that he might supply links in the chain of evidence to trace the real murderer. Of course, you know that Mr Gabriel lately went to Germany?'

'Yes, I know that.'

'Very good! As the initials "G. P." also stood for Gabriel Pendle, I was not at all sure but what the pistol might be his. For the moment I assumed that it was, that he had shot Jenthiam, and that the stolen money had been used by him.'

'But you hadn't the shadow of a proof, Mr Baltic.'

'I had the pistol with the initials,' retorted the missionary, 'but, as I said, I never suspected Mr Gabriel. I only assumed his guilt for the moment to enable me to trace the actual criminal. To make a long story short, Mr Inspector, I went up to London and called at Cook's office. There I discovered that Mr Gabriel had paid for his ticket with a ten-pound note. That note,' added Baltic, impressively, 'was one of those given by the bishop to Jenthiam and stolen by the assassin from the body of his victim. I knew it by the number.'

Tinkler thumped the desk with his hand in a state of uncontrolled excitement. 'Then Mr Gabriel must be guilty,' he declared in his most stentorian voice.

'Hush, if you please,' said Baltic, with a glance at the door. 'There is no need to let your subordinates know what is not true.'

'What is not true, sir?'

'Precisely. I questioned Mr Gabriel on my return, and learned that he had changed a twenty-pound note at The Derby Winner prior to his departure for Germany. Mosk, the landlord, gave him the ten I traced to Cook's and two fives. Hush, please! Mr Gabriel also told me that he had lent the pistol to Mosk to protect himself from tramps when riding to and from Southberry, so—'

'I see! I see!' roared Tinkler, purple with excitement. 'Mosk is the guilty man!'

'Quite so,' rejoined Baltic, unmoved. 'You have hit upon the right man at last.'

'So Bill Mosk shot Jenthiam. Oh, Lord! Damme! Why?'

'Don't swear, Mr Inspector, and I'll tell you. Mosk committed the murder to get the

two hundred pounds. I suspected Mosk almost from the beginning. The man was almost always drunk and frequently in tears. I found out while at The Derby Winner that he could not pay his rent shortly before Jentharn's murder. After the crime I learned from Sir Harry Brace, the landlord, that Mosk had paid his rent. When Mr Gabriel told me about the lending of the pistol and the changing of the note, I went to Sir Harry's bank, and there, Mr Inspector, I discovered that the bank-notes with which he paid his rent were those given by the bishop to Jentharn. On that evidence, on the evidence of the pistol, on the evidence that Mosk was absent at Southberry on the night of the murder, I ask you to obtain a warrant and arrest the man this afternoon.'

'I shall see a magistrate about it at once,' fussed Tinkler, tearing up his now useless memoranda. 'Bill Mosk! Damme! Bill Mosk! I never should have thought a drunken hound like him would have the pluck to do it. Hang me if I did!'

'I don't call it pluck to shoot an unarmed man, Mr Inspector. It is rather the act of a coward.'

'Coward or not, he must swing for it,' growled Tinkler. 'Mr Baltic, sir, I am proud of you. You have done what I could not do myself. Take my hand and my thanks, sir. Become a detective, sir, and learn our trade. When you know our business you will do wonders, sir, wonders!'

In the same patronising way a rush-light might have congratulated the sun on his illuminating powers and have advised him to become—a penny candle.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE WAGES OF SIN

WHILE the wickedness and fate of Mosk were being discussed and settled in Inspector Tinkler's office, Bishop Pendle was meditating on a very important subject, important both to his domestic circle and to the wider claims of his exalted position. This was none other than a consideration of Gabriel's engagement to the hotelkeeper's daughter, and an argument with himself as to whether or no he should consent to so obvious a *mesalliance*. The bishop was essentially a fair dealer, and not the man to do things by halves, therefore it occurred to him that, as he had consented to George's marriage with Mab, he was bound in all honour to deliberate on the position of his youngest son with regard to Miss Mosk. To use a homely but forcible proverb, it was scarcely just to make beef of one and mutton of the other, the more especially as Gabriel had behaved extremely well in relation to his

knowledge of his parents' painful position and his own nameless condition. Some sons so placed would have regarded themselves as absolved from all filial ties, but Gabriel, with true honour and true affection, never dreamed of acting in so heartless a manner; on the contrary, he clung the closer to his unhappy father, and gave him, as formerly, both obedience and filial love. Such honourable conduct, such tender kindness, deserved to be rewarded, and, as the bishop determined, rewarded it should be in the only way left to him.

Having arrived at this liberal conclusion, Dr Pendle decided to make himself personally known to Bell and see with his own eyes the reported beauty which had captivated Gabriel. Also, he wished to judge for himself as to the girl's clever mind and modesty and common sense, all of which natural gifts Gabriel had represented her as possessing in no ordinary degree. Therefore, on the very afternoon when trouble was brewing against Mosk in the Beaminster Police Office, the bishop of the See took his way to The Derby Winner. The sight of Dr Pendle in the narrow streets of the old town fluttered the slatternly dwellers therein not a little, and the majority of the women whisked indoors in mortal terror, lest they should be reproved *ex cathedra* for their untidy looks and unswept doorsteps. It was like the descent of an Olympian god, and awestruck mortals fled swift-footed from the glory of his presence. To use a vigorous American phrase, they made themselves scarce.

The good bishop was amused and rather amazed by this universal scattering, for it was his wish to be loved rather than feared. He was in a decidedly benign frame of mind, as on that very morning he had received a letter from his wife stating that she was coming home within a few days, much benefited by the Nauheim baths. This latter piece of intelligence particularly pleased the bishop, as he judged thereby that his wife would be better able to endure the news of her first husband's untimely re-appearance. Dr Pendle was anxious that she should know all at once, so that he could marry her again as speedily as possible, and thereby put an end to an uncomfortable and dangerous state of things. Thus reflecting and thus deciding, the bishop descended the stony street in his usual stately manner, and even patted the heads of one or two stray urchins, who smiled in his face with all the confidence of childhood. Afterwards, the mothers of those especial children were offensively proud at this episcopal blessing, and had 'words' with less fortunate mothers in consequence. Out of such slight events can dissensions arise.

As Dr Pendle neared The Derby Winner he was unlucky enough to encounter Mrs Pansey, who was that afternoon harassing the neighbourhood with one of her parochial visitations. She carried a black bag stuffed with bundles

of badly-printed, badly-written tracts, and was distributing this dry fodder as food for Christian souls, along with a quantity of advice and reproof. The men swore, the women wept, the children scrambled out of the way when Mrs Pansey swooped down like a black vulture ; and when the bishop chanced upon her he looked round as though he wished to follow the grateful example of the vanishing population. But Mrs Pansey gave him no chance. She blocked the way, spread out her hands to signify pleasure, and, without greeting the bishop, bellowed out in pretty loud tones, 'At last ! at last ! and not before you are needed, Dr Pendle.'

'Am I needed ?' asked the mystified bishop, mildly.

'The Derby Winner !' was all that Mrs Pansey vouchsafed in the way of an explanation, and cast a glance over her shoulder at the public-house.

'The Derby Winner,' repeated Dr Pendle, reddening, as he wondered if this busy-body guessed his errand. 'I am now on my way there.'

'I am glad to hear it, bishop !' said Mrs Pansey, with a toss of her plumed bonnet. 'How often have I asked you to personally examine into the drinking and gambling and loose pleasures which make it a Jericho of sin ?'

'Yes, yes, I remember you said something about it when you were at the palace.'

'Said something about it, my lord ; I said everything about it, but now that you will see it for yourself, I trust you will ask Sir Harry Brace to shut it up.'

'Dear, dear !' said the bishop, nervously, 'that is an extreme measure.'

'An extreme necessity, rather,' retorted Mrs Pansey, wagging an admonitory finger ; 'do not compound with shameless sin, bishop. The house is a regular upas tree. It makes the men drunkards'—Mrs Pansey raised her voice so that the whole neighbourhood might hear — 'the women sluts' — there was an angry murmur from the houses at this term — 'and the children — the children —' Mrs Pansey seized a passing brat. 'Look at this — this image of the Creator,' and she offered the now weeping child as an illustration.

Before Dr Pendle could say a word, the door of a near house was flung violently open, and a blowzy, red-faced young woman pounced out, all on fire for a fight. She tore the small sinner from the grasp of Mrs Pansey, and began to scold vigorously. 'Ho indeed, mum ! ho indeed ! and would you be pleased to repeat what you're a-takin' of behind ladies' backs.'

'Mrs Trumby ! the bishop, woman !'

'No more a woman than yourself, mum ; and beggin' his lordship's parding, I 'opas as he'll tell widders as ain't bin mothers not to poke their stuck-up noses into what they knows nothing of.'

By this time a crowd was collecting, and evinced lively signs of pleasure at the prospect of seeing the Bishop of Beorminster as umpire in a street row. But the bishop had had quite enough of the affray, and without mincing matters fled as quickly as his dignity would permit towards the friendly shelter of The Derby Winner, leaving Mesdames Pansey and Trumby in the thick of a wordy war. The first-named lady held her own for some considerable time, until routed by her antagonist's superior knowledge of Billingsgate. Then it appeared very plainly that for once she had met with her match, and she hastily abandoned the field, pursued by a storm of highly-coloured abuse from the irate Mrs Trumby. It was many a long day before Mrs Pansey ventured into that neighbourhood again ; and she ever afterwards referred to it in terms which a rigid Calvinist usually applies to Papal Rome. As for Mrs Trumby herself, the archdeacon's widow said the whole Communion Service over *her* with heartfelt and prayerful earnestness.

Bell flushed and whitened, and stammered and trembled, when she beheld the imposing figure of the bishop standing in the dark, narrow passage. To her he was a far-removed deity throned upon inaccessible heights, awesome and powerful, to be propitiated with humbleness and prayer ; and the mere sight of him in her immediate neighbourhood brought her heart into her mouth. For once she lost her nonchalant demeanour, her free and easy speech, and stood nervously silent before him with hanging head and reddened cheeks. Fortunately for her she was dressed that day in a quiet and well-fitting frock of blue serge, and wore less than her usual number of jingling brass ornaments. The bishop, who had an eye for a comely figure and a pretty face, approved of her looks ; but he was clever enough to see that, however painted and shaped, she was made of very common clay, and would never be able to take her place amongst the porcelain maidens to whom Gabriel was accustomed. Still she seemed modest and shy as a maid should be, and Dr Pendle looked on her kindly and encouragingly.

'You are Miss Mosk, are you not ?' he asked, raising his hat.

'Yes, my — my lord,' faltered Bell, not daring to raise her eyes above the bishop's gaiters. 'I am Bell Mosk.'

'In that case I should like some conversation with you. Can you take me to a more private place ?'

'The little parlour, my lord ; this way, please,' and Bell, reassured by her visitor's kindly manner, conducted him into her father's private snugger at the back of the bar. Here she placed a chair for the bishop, and waited anxiously to hear if he came to scold or praise. Dr Pendle came to the point at once.

'I presume you know who I am, Miss Mosk?' he said quietly.

'Oh, yes, sir; the Bishop of Beorminster.'

'Quite so; but I am here less as the bishop than as Gabriel's father.'

'Yes,' whispered Bell, and stole a frightened look at the speaker's face.

'There is no need to be alarmed,' said Dr Pendle, encouragingly. 'I do not come here to scold you.'

'I hope not, my lord!' said Miss Mosk, recovering herself a trifle, 'as I have done nothing to be scolded for. If I am in love with Gabriel, and he with me, 'tis only human nature, and as such can't be run down.'

'That entirely depends upon the point of view which is taken,' observed the bishop, mildly. 'For instance, I have a right to be annoyed that my son should engage himself to you without consulting me.'

Bell produced a foolish little lace handkerchief. 'Of course, I know I ain't a lady, sir,' said she, tearfully. 'But I do love Gabriel, and I'm sure I'll do my best to make him happy.'

'I do not doubt that, Miss Mosk; but are you sure that you are wise in marrying out of your sphere?'

'King Cophetua loved a beggar maid, my lord; and the Lord of Burleigh married a village girl,' said Bell, who knew her Tennyson, 'and I'm sure I'm as good as both lots.'

'Certainly,' assented the bishop, dryly; 'but if I remember rightly, the Lord of Burleigh's bride sank under her burden of honours.'

Bell tossed her head in spite of the bishop's presence. 'Oh, she had no backbone, not a bit. I've got heaps more sense than she had. But you mustn't think I want to run after gentlemen, sir. I have had plenty of offers; and I can get more if I want to. Gabriel has only to say the word and the engagement is off.'

'Indeed, I think that would be the wiser course,' replied the bishop, who wondered more and more what Gabriel could see in this commonplace beauty attractive to his refined nature, 'but I know that my son loves you dearly, and I wish to see him happy.'

'I hope you don't think I want to make him miserable, sir,' cried Bell, her colour and temper rising.

'No! no! Miss Mosk. But a matter like this requires reflection and consideration.'

'We have reflected, my lord. Gabriel and me's going to marry.'

'Indeed! will you not ask my consent?'

'I ask it now, sir! I'm sure,' said Bell, again becoming tearful, 'this ain't my idea of love-making, to be badgered into saying I'm not good enough for him. If he's a man let him marry me, if he's a worm he needn't. I've no call to go begging. No, indeed!'

The bishop began to feel somewhat embarrassed, for Miss Mosk applied every word

to herself in so personal a way, that whatever he said constituted a ground of offence, and he scarcely knew upon what lines to conduct so delicate a conversation. Also the girl was crying, and her tears made Dr Pendle fear that he was exercising his superiority in a brutal manner. Fortunately the conversation was brought abruptly to an end, for while the bishop was casting about how to resume it, the door opened softly and Mr Mosk presented himself.

'Father!' cried Bell, in anything but pleased tones.

'My gal!' replied Mosk, with husky tenderness—and in tears. 'What 'ave you bin sayin' to her, sir?' he added, with a ferocious glance at Pendle.

'Hush, father! 'tis his lordship, the bishop.'

'I know'd the bishop's looks afore you was born, my gal,' said Mosk, playfully, 'and it's proud I am to see 'im under m' umble roof. 'Lor! 'ere's a 'appy family meeting.'

'I think,' said the bishop, with a glance at Mosk to assure himself that the man was sober—'I think, Miss Mosk, that it is advisable your father and myself should have a few words in private.'

'I don't want father to interfere—' began Bell, when her parent gripped her arm, and cutting her short with a scowl, conducted her to the door.

'Don't you git m' back up,' he whispered savagely, 'or you'll be cussedly sorry for yourself an' everyone else. Go to yer mother.'

'But, father, I—'

'Go to yer mother, I tell y,' growled the man, whereupon Bell, seeing that her father was in a soberly brutal state, which was much more dangerous than his usual drunken condition, hastily left the room, and closed the door after her. 'An' now, m' lord,' continued Mosk, returning to the bishop, 'jus' look at me.'

Dr Pendle did so, but it was not a pretty object he contemplated, for the man was untidy, unwashed and frowsy in looks. He was red-eyed and white-faced, but perfectly sober, although there was every appearance about him of having only lately recovered from a prolonged debauch. Consequently his temper was morose and uncertain, and the bishop, having a respect for the dignity of his position and cloth, felt uneasy at the prospect of a quarrel with this degraded creature. But Dr Pendle's spirit was not one to fail him in such an emergency, and he surveyed Mr Caliban in a cool and leisurely manner.

'I'm a father, I am!' continued Mosk, defiantly, 'an' as good a father as you. My gal's goin' to marry your son. Now, m' lord, what have you to say to that?'

'Moderate your tone, my man,' said the bishop, imperiously; 'a conversation conducted in this manner can hardly be productive of

good results either to yourself or to your daughter.'

'I don' mean any 'arm!' replied Mosk, rather cowed, 'but I mean to 'ave m' rights, I do.'

'Your rights? What do you mean?'

'M' rights as a father,' explained the man, sulkily. 'Your son's bin runnin' arter m' gal, and lowerin' of her good name.'

'Hold your tongue, sir. Mr Pendle's intentions with regard to Miss Mosk are most honourable.'

'They'd better be,' threatened the other, 'or I'll know how to make 'em so. Ah, that I shall.'

'You talk idly, man,' said the bishop, coldly.

'I talk wot'll do, m' lord. Who's yer son, anyhow? My gal's as good as he, an' a sight better. She's born on the right side of the blanket, she is. There now!'

A qualm as of deadly sickness seized Dr Pendle, and he started from his chair with a pale face and a startled eye. 'What do you—you—you mean, man?' he asked again.

Mosk laughed scornfully, and lugging a packet of papers out of his pocket flung it on the table. 'That's what I mean,' said he; 'certificate! letters! story! Yer wife ain't yer wife; Gabriel's only Gabriel ain't Pendle at all!'

'Certificate! letters!' gasped the bishop, snatching them up. 'You got these from Jentham.'

'That I did; he left them with me afore he went out to meet you.'

'You—you murderer!'

'Murderer! Halloo! cried Mosk, recoiling, pale and startled.

'Murderer!' repeated Dr Pendle. 'Jentham showed these to me on the common; you must have taken them from his dead body. You are the man who shot him.'

'It's a lie,' whispered Mosk, with pale lips, shrinking back, 'an' if I did, you daren't tell. I know your secret.'

'Secret or not, you shall suffer for your crime,' cried the bishop, with a stride towards the door.

'Stand back! It's a lie! I'm desperate. I didn't kill— Hark!'

There was a noise outside which terrified the guilty conscience of the murderer. He did not know that the officers of justice were at the door, nor did the bishop, but the unexpected sound turned their blood to water, and made their hearts, the innocent and the guilty, knock at their ribs. A sharp knock came at the door.

'Help!' cried the bishop. 'The murderer!' and he sprang forward to throw himself on the shaking, shambling wretch. Mosk eluded him, but uttered a squeaking cry like the shriek of a hunted hare in the jaws of the greyhound. The next instant the room seemed to swarm with men, and the bishop

as in a dream heard the merciless formula of the law pronounced by Tinkler,—

'In the name of the Queen I arrest you, William Mosk, on a charge of murder.'

CHAPTER XXXV

THE HONOUR OF GABRIEL

GREAT as had been the popular excitement over Jentham's death, it was almost mild compared with that which swept through Beaminster when his murderer was discovered and arrested. No one had ever thought of connecting Mosk with the crime; and even on his seizure by warrant many declined to believe in his guilt. Nevertheless, when the man was brought before the magistrates, the evidence adduced against him by Baltic was so strong and clear and irrefutable that, without a dissenting word from the Bench, the prisoner was committed to stand his trial at the ensuing assizes. Mosk made no defence; he did not even offer a remark; but, accepting his fate with sullen apathy, sunk into a lethargic, unobservant state, out of which nothing and no person could arouse him. His brain appeared to have been stunned by the suddenness of his calamity.

Many people expressed surprise that Bishop Pendle should have been present when the man was arrested, and some blamed him for having even gone to The Derby Winner. A disreputable pot-house, they whispered, was not the neighbourhood in which a spiritual lord should be found. But Mrs Pansey, for once on the side of right, soon put a stop to such talk by informing one and all that the bishop had visited the hotel at her request in order to satisfy himself that the reports and scandals about it were true. That Mosk should have been arrested while Dr Pendle was making his inquiries was a pure coincidence, and it was greatly to the bishop's credit that he had helped to secure the murderer. In fact, Mrs Pansey was not very sure but what he had taken the wretch in charge with his own august hands.

And the bishop himself? He was glad that Mrs Pansey, to foster her own vanity, had put this complexion on his visit to the hotel, as it did away with any need of a true but uncomfortable explanation. Also he had carried home with him the packet tossed on the table by Mosk, therefore, so far as actual proof was concerned, his secret was still his own. But the murderer knew it, for not only were the certificate and letters in the bundle, but there was also a sheet of memoranda set down by Krant, *alias* Jentham, which proved clearly that the so-called Mrs Pendle was really his wife.

'If I destroy these papers,' thought the

bishop, 'all immediate evidence likely to reveal the truth will be done away with. But Mosk knows that Amy is not my wife; that my marriage is illegal, that my children are nameless; out of revenge for my share in his arrest, he may tell someone the story and reveal the name of the church wherein Amy was married to Krant. Then the register there will disclose my secret to anyone curious enough to search the books. What shall I do? What can I do: I dare not visit Mosk. I dare not ask Graham to see him. There is nothing to be done but to hope for the best. If this miserable man speaks out, I shall be ruined.'

Dr Pendle quite expected ruin, for he had no hope that a coarse and cruel criminal would be honourable enough to hold his tongue. But this belief, although natural enough, showed how the bishop misjudged the man. From the moment of his arrest, Mosk spoke no ill of Dr Pendle; he hinted at no secret, and to all appearances was quite determined to carry it with him to the scaffold. On the third day of his arrest, however, he roused himself from his sullen silence, and asked that young Mr Pendle might be sent for. The governor of the prison, anticipating a confession to be made in due form to a priest, hastily sent for Gabriel. The young man obeyed the summons at once, for, his father having informed him of Mosk's acquaintance with the secret, he was most anxious to learn from the man himself whether he intended to talk or keep silent. It was with a beating heart that Gabriel was ushered into the prison cell.

By special permission the interview was allowed to be private, for Mosk positively refused to speak in the presence of a third person. He was sitting on his bed when the parson entered, but looked up with a gleam of joy in his blood-shot eyes when he was left alone with the young man.

'Tis good of you to come and see a poor devil, Mr Pendle,' he said in a grateful voice. 'Y'll be no loser by yer kin'ness, I can tell y.'

'To whom should a priest come, save to those who need him?'

'Oh, stow that!' growled Mosk, in a tone of disgust; 'if I want religion, I can get more than enough from that Baltic cove. He's never done preachin' and prayin' as if I were a bloomin' heathen. No, Mr Pendle, it ain't as a priest as I asked y' t' see me, but as a man—as a gentleman!' His voice broke. 'It's about my poor gal,' he whispered.

'About Bell,' faltered Gabriel, nervously clasping his hands together.

'Yes! I s'pose, sir, you won't think of marryin' her now?'

'Mosk! Mosk! who am I that I should visit your sins on her innocent head?'

'Hold 'ard!' cried Mosk, his face lighting up; 'does that Bible speech mean as y' are goin' to behave honourable?'

'How else did you expect me to behave?'

Mosk!' said Gabriel, laying a slim hand on the man's knee, 'after your arrest I went to The Derby Winner. It is shut up, and I was unable to enter, as Bell refused to see me. The shock of your evil deed has made your wife so ill that her life is despaired of. Bell is by her bedside night and day, so this is no time for me to talk of marriage. But I give you my word of honour, that in spite of the disgrace you have brought upon her, Bell shall be my wife.'

Mosk burst out crying like a child. 'God bless you, Mr Pendle!' he sobbed, catching at Gabriel's hand. 'You have lifted a weight off my heart. I don't care if I do swing now; I daresay I deserve to swing, but as long as she's all right!—my poor gal! It's a sore disgrace to her. And Su-an, too. Susan's dyin', y' say! Well, it's my fault; but if I've sinned I've got to pay a long price for it.'

'Alas! alas! the wages of sin is death.'

'I don't want religion, I tell 'ee,' said Mosk, drying his eyes; 'I've lived bad and I'll die bad.'

'Mosk! Mosk! even at the eleventh hour—'

'That's all right, Mr Pendle; I know all about th' leventh hour, and repentance and the rest of th' rot. Stow it, sir, and listen. You'll keep true to my gal?'

'On the honour of a gentleman. I love her; she is as dear to me now as she ever was.'

That's wot I expected y' to say, sir. Y' allays was a gentleman. Now you 'ark, Mr Pendle; I knows all about that mar—'

'Don't speak of it!' interrupted Gabriel, with a shudder.

'I ain't goin' to, sir. His lor'ship 'ave the papers I took from him as I did for; so no one but yerself an' yer father knows about 'em. I sha'n't breathe a word about that Krant marriage to a single, solitary soul, and when I dies the secret will die with me. You're actin' square by my poor gal, sir, so I'm agoin' to act square by you. It ain't for me to cover with shame the name as you're goin' to give my Bell.'

'Thank you!' gasped Gabriel, whose emotion at this promise was so great that he could hardly speak, 'thank you!'

'I don' need no thanks, sir; you're square, an' I'm square. So now as I've got that off m' mind you'd better go. I ain't fit company for the likes of you.'

'Let me say a prayer, Mosk?'

'No sir; it's too late to pray for me.'

Gabriel raised his hand solemnly. 'As Christ liveth, it is not too late. Though your sins be as—'

'Goo'bye,' interrupted Mosk, and throwing himself on his bed, he turned his face to the wall. Not another word of confession or repentance could Gabriel get him to speak. Nevertheless, the clergyman knelt down on the chill stones and implored God's pardon for

this stubborn sinner, whose heart was hardened against the divine grace. Mosk gave no sign of hearing the supplication; but when Gabriel was passing out of the cell, he suddenly rushed forward and kissed his hand. 'God, in his mercy, pity and pardon you, Mosk,' said Gabriel, and left the wretched man with his frozen heart shivering under the black, black shadow of the gallows.

It was with a sense of relief that the curate found himself once more in the sunshine. As he walked swiftly along towards the palace, to carry the good news to his father, he thanked God in his heart that the shadow of impending disaster had passed away. The incriminating papers were in the right hands; their secret was known only to himself, to Graham, and to the bishop. When the truth was told to his mother, and her position had been rectified by a second marriage, Gabriel felt that all would be safe. Cargrinn knew nothing of the truth, and therefore could do nothing. With the discovery of the actual criminal all his wicked plans had come to nought; and it only remained for the man he had wronged so deeply to take from him the position of trust which he had so dishonourably abused. As for Gabriel himself, he determined to marry Bell Mosk, as he had promised her miserable father, and to sail with his wife for the mission fields of the South Seas. There they could begin a new life, and, happy in one another's love, would forget the past in assiduous labours amongst the heathen. Baltic knew the South Seas; Baltic could advise and direct how they should begin to labour in that vineyard of the Lord; and Baltic could start them on a new career for the glory of God and the sowing of the good seed. With thoughts like these, Gabriel walked along, wrapped in almost apocalyptic visions, and saw with inspired gaze the past sorrows of himself and Bell fade and vanish in the glory of a God-guided, God-provided future. It was not the career he had shadowed forth for himself; but he resigned his ambitions for Bell's sake, and aided by love overcame his preference for civilised ease. *Vincit, qui se vincit.*

While Gabriel was thus battling, and thus overcoming, Baltic was seated beside Mosk, striving to bring him to a due sense of his wickedness and weakness, and need of God's forgiveness. He had prayed, and reproved, and persuaded, and besought, many times before; but had hitherto been baffled by the cynicism and stubborn nature of the man. One less enthusiastic than Baltic would have been discouraged, but, braced by fanaticism, the man was resolved to conquer this adversary of Christ and win back an erring soul from the ranks of Satan's evil host. With his well-worn Bible on his knee, he expounded text after text, amplified the message of redemption and pardon, and, with all the eloquence religion had taught his tongue, urged Mosk to plead for mercy from

the God he had so deeply offended. But all in vain.

'Wot's th' use of livin' bad all these years, and then turnin' good for five minutes?' growled Mosk, contemptuously. 'There ain't no sense in it.'

'Think of the penitent thief, my brother. He was in the same position as you now are, yet he was promised paradise by God's own Son!'

Mosk shrugged his shoulders. 'It's easy enough promisin', I daresay; but 'ow do I know, or do you know as the promise 'ull be kept?'

'Believe and you shall be saved.'

'I can't believe what you say.'

'Not what I say, poor sinner, but what Christ says.'

There was no possible answer to this last remark, so Mosk launched out on another topic. 'I like yer cheek, I do,' he growled; 'it's you that have got me into this mess, and now you wants me to take up with your preaching.'

'I want to save your soul, man!'

'You'd much better have saved my life. If you'd left me alone I wouldn't have bin caught.'

'Then you would have gone on living in a state of sin. So long as you were safe from the punishment of man you would not have turned to God. Now you must. He is your only friend.'

'It's more nor you are. I don't call it friendship to bring a man to the gallows!'

'I do—when he has committed a crime,' said Baltic, gravely. 'You must suffer and repent, or God will not forgive you. You are Cain, for you have slain your brother.'

'You've got to prove that,' growled Mosk, cunningly; 'look, Mr Baltic, jus' drop religion for a bit, and tell me 'ow you know as I killed that cove.'

Baltic closed his Bible, and looked mildly at the prisoner.

'The evidence against you is perfectly clear, Mosk,' said he, deliberately. 'I traced the notes stolen from the dead man to your possession. You paid your rent to Sir Harry Brace with the fruits of your sin.'

'Yes, I did!' said Mosk, sullenly. 'I know it ain't no good sayin' as I didn't kill Jenthiam, for you're one too many for me. But wot business had he to go talkin' of hundreds of pounds to a poor chap like me as 'adn't one copper to rub agin the other? If he'd held his tongue I'd 'ave known nothin', and he'd 'ave bin alive now for you to try your 'and on in the religious way. Jenthiam was a bad 'un, if you like.'

'We are all sinners, Mosk.'

'Some of us are wuss than others. With the 'ception of murderin' Jenthiam and priggin' his cash, I ain't done nothin' to no one as I knows of. Look here, Mr Baltic, I've done one bit of business to-day with the

parson, and now I'm goin' to do another bit with you. 'Ave you pen and paper?'

'Yes!' Baltic produced his pocket-book and a stylographic pen. 'Are you going to confess?'

'I s'pose I may as well,' said Mosk, scowling. 'You'll be blaming young Mr Pendle, or the bishop, if I don't; and as the fust of 'em's goin' to marry my Bell, I don't want trouble there.'

'Won't you confess from a sense of your sin?'

'No, I won't. It's my gal and not repentance as makes me tell the truth. I want to put her an' young Mr Pendle fair an' square.'

'Well,' said Baltic, getting ready to write, 'confession is a sign that your heart is softening.'

'It ain't your religion as is doing it, then,' sneered Mosk. 'Now then, fire away, old cove.'

The man then went on to state that he was desperately hard up when Jentham came to stay at The Derby Winner, and, as he was unable to pay his rent, he feared lest Sir Harry should turn him and his sick wife and much-loved daughter into the streets. Jentham, in his cups, several times boasted that he was about to receive a large sum of money from an unknown friend on Southberry Heath, and on one occasion went so far as to inform Mosk of the time and place when he would receive it. He was thus confidential when very drunk, on Mosk reproaching him with not paying for his board and lodging. As the landlord was in much need of money, his avarice was roused by the largeness of the sum hinted at by Jentham; and thinking that the man was a tramp, who would not be missed, he determined to murder and rob him. Gabriel Pendle had given—or rather, had lent—Mosk a pistol to protect himself from gypsies, and vagrants, and harvesters on his frequent night journeys across the lonely heath between Beorminster and Southberry. On the Sunday when the money was to be paid at the Cross Roads, Mosk rode over to Southberry; and late at night, about the time of the appointment, he went on horseback to the Cross Roads. A storm came on and detained him, so it was after the bishop had given the money to Jentham that Mosk arrived. He saw the bishop departing, and recognised his face in the searching glare of the lightning flashes. When Dr Pendle had disappeared, Mosk rode up to Jentham, who, with the money in his hand, stood in the drenching rain under the sign-post. He looked up as the horse approached, but did not run away, being rendered pot-valiant by the liquor he had drunk earlier in the evening. Before the man could recognise him, Mosk had jumped off his horse; and, at close quarters,

had shot Jentham through the heart. 'He fell in the mud like a leap of clothes,' said Mosk, 'so I jus' tied up the 'oss to the sign-post, an' went through his pockets. I got the cash—a bundle of notes, they was—and some other papers as I found. Then I dragged his corp into a ditch by the road, and galloped off on m' 'oss as quick as I cud go back to Southberry. There I stayed all night, sayin' as I'd bin turned back by the storm from riding over to Beorminster. Nex' day I come back to m' hotel, and a week arter I paid m' rent to Sir 'Arry with the notes I'd stole. I guv a ten of 'em to young Mr Pendle, and two fives of m' own, as he wanted to change a twenty. If I'd know'd as it was dangerous I'd hev gone up to London and got other notes; but I never thought I'd be found out by the numbers. No one thought as I did it; but I did. 'Ow did you think 'twas me, guv'nor?'

'You were always drunk,' answered Baltic, who had written all this down, 'and I sometimes heard you talking to yourself. Then Sir Harry said that you had paid your rent, and he did not know where you got the money from. Afterwards I found out about the pistol and the notes you had paid Sir Harry. I had no proof of your guilt, although I suspected you for a long time; but it was the pistol which Mother Jael picked up that put me on the right track.'

'Ah, wos it now?' said Mosk, with regret. 'Th' 'oss knocked that out of m', and when I wos tyin' him up, and I 'adn't no time to look for it in the mud an' dark. Y' wouldn't hev caught me, I s'pose, if it hadn't bin for that bloomin' pistol?'

'Oh, yes, I would,' rejoined Baltic, coolly; 'the notes would have hanged you in any case, and I would have got at them somehow. I suspected you all along.'

'Wish y' 'adn't come to m' house,' muttered Mosk, discontentedly.

'I was guided there by God to punish your sin.'

'Yah! Stuff! Gimme that confession and I'll sign it.'

But Baltic, wary old fellow as he was, would not permit this without due formality. He had the governor of the gaol brought to the cell, and Mosk with a laugh signed the confession which condemned him in the presence of two witnesses. The governor took it away with him, and again left Baltic and the murderer alone. They eyed one another.

'Now that I know all—' began Baltic.

'Y' don't know all,' interrupted Mosk with a taunting laugh; 'there's sumthin' I ain't told y', an' I ain't agoin' to tell.'

'You have confessed your sin, that is enough for me. God is softening your hard heart, Grace is coming to your soul. My brother! my brother! let us pray.'

'Sha'n't! Leave me alone, can't y'?'.

Baltic fell on his knees. 'Oh, merciful God, have pity upon this most unhappy man sunk in the pit of sin. Let the Redeemer, Thy only begotten Son, stretch out His saving—'

Mosk began to sing a comic song in a harsh voice.

'His saving hand, oh God, to drag this poor soul from perdition. Let him call upon Thy most Holy Name out of the low dungeon. Cut him not off in the—'

'Stop! stop!' shrieked the unhappy man, with his fingers in his ears, 'oh, stop!'

'His sins are as scarlet, but the precious blood of the Lamb will bleach them whiter than fine wool. Have mercy, Heavenly Father—'

Mosk, overwrought and worn out, began to sob hysterically. At the sound of that grief Baltic sprang to his feet and laid a heavy hand on the shoulder of the sinner.

'On your knees! on your knees, my brother,' he cried in trumpet tones, with flashing eyes, 'implore mercy before the Great White Throne. Now is the time for repentance. God pity you! Christ save you! Satan loose you!' And he forced the man on to his knees. 'Down in Christ's name.'

A choking, strangled cry escaped from the murderer, and his body pitched forward heavily on the cold stones. Baltic continued to pray.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE REBELLION OF MRS PENDLE

'THANK God!' said the bishop, when he heard from Gabriel's lips that the criminal, who knew his secret, had promised to be silent, 'at last I can breathe freely; but what a price to pay for our safety—what a price!'

'Do you mean my marriage to Bell?' asked Gabriel, steadily.

'Yes! If she was undesirable before, she is more so now. So far as I have seen her I do not think she is the wife for you; and as the daughter of that blood-stained man—oh, Gabriel, my son! how can I consent that you should take her to your bosom?'

'Father,' replied the curate, quietly, 'you seem to forget that I love Bell dearly. It was not to close Mosk's mouth that I consented to marry her; in any case I should do so. She promised to become my wife in her time of prosperity, and I should be the meanest of men did I leave her now that she is in trouble. Bell was dear to me before; she is dearer to me now; and I am proud to become her husband.'

'But her father is a murderer, Gabriel?'

'Would you make her responsible for his sins? That is not like you, father.'

The bishop groaned. 'God knows I do not wish to thwart you, for you have been a good son to me. But reflect for one moment how public her father's crime has been; everywhere his wickedness is known; and should you marry this girl, your wife, however innocent, must bear the stigma of being that man's daughter. How would you, a sensitive and refined man shrinking from public scandal, bear the shame of hearing your wife spoken about as a murderer's daughter?'

'I shall take steps to avert that danger. Yes, father, when Bell becomes my wife we shall leave England for ever.'

'Gabriel! Gabriel!' cried the bishop, piteously, 'where would you go?'

'To the South Seas,' replied the curate, his thin face lighting up with excitement; 'there, as Baltic tells us, missionaries are needed for the heathen. I shall become a missionary, father, and Bell will work by my side to expiate her father's sin by aiding me to bring light to those lost in darkness.'

'My poor boy, you dream Utopia. From what I saw of that girl, she is not one to take up such a life. You will not find your Priscilla in her. She is of the world, worldly.'

'The affliction which has befallen her may turn her thoughts from the world.'

'No!' said the bishop, with quiet authority. 'I am, as you know, a man who does not speak idly or without experience, and I tell you, Gabriel, that the girl is not the stuff out of which you can mould an ideal wife. She is handsome, I grant you; and she seems to be gifted with a fair amount of common sense; but, if you will forgive my plain speaking of one dear to you, she is vain of her looks, fond of dress and admiration, and is not possessed of a refined nature. She says that she loves you; that may be; but you will find that she does not love you sufficiently to merge her life in yours, to condemn herself to exile amongst savages for your sake. Love and single companionship are not enough for such an one; she wants—and she will always want—society, flattery, amusement and excitement. My love for you, Gabriel, makes me anxious to think well of her, but my fatherly care mistrusts her as a wife for a man of your nature.'

'But I love her,' faltered Gabriel; 'I wish to marry her.'

'Believe me, you will never marry her, my poor lad.'

Gabriel's face flushed. 'Father, would you forbid—?'

'No,' interrupted Dr Pendle. 'I shall not forbid; but she will decline. If you tell her about your missionary scheme, I am confident she will refuse to become your wife. Ask her by all means; keep your word as

a gentleman should ; but prepare yourself for a disappointment.

'Ah, father, you do not know my Bell.'

'It is on that point we disagree, Gabriel. I do know her ; you do not. My experience tells me that your faith is misplaced.'

'We shall see,' said Gabriel, standing up very erect ; 'you judge her too harshly, sir. Bell will become my wife, I am sure of that.'

'If she does,' replied the bishop, giving his hand to the young man, 'I shall be the first to welcome her.'

'My dear, dear father !' cried Gabriel, with emotion, 'you are like yourself ; always kind, always generous. Thank you, father !' And the curate, not trusting himself to speak further, lest he should break down altogether, left the room hurriedly.

With a weary sigh Dr Pendle sank into his seat, and pressed his hand to his aching head. He was greatly relieved to know that his secret was safe with Mosk ; but his troubles were not yet at an end. It was imperative that he should reprove and dismiss Cargrim for his duplicity, and most necessary for the rearrangement of their lives that Mrs Pendle should be informed of the untimely resurrection of her husband. Also, foreseeing the termination of Gabriel's unhappy romance, he was profoundly sorry for the young man, knowing well how disastrous would be the effect on one so impressionable and highly strung. No wonder the bishop sighed ; no wonder he felt depressed. His troubles had come after the manner of their kind, 'not in single spies, but in battalions,' and he needed all his strength of character, all his courage, all his faith in God, to meet and baffle anxieties so overwhelming. In his affliction he cried aloud with bitter-mouthed Jeremiah, 'Thou hast removed my soul far off from peace ; I forget prosperity.'

In due time Mrs Pendle reappeared in Beorminster, wonderfully improved in health and spirits. The astringent waters of Nauheim had strengthened her heart, so that it now beat with regular throbs, where formerly it had fluttered feebly ; they had brought the blood to the surface of the skin, and had flushed her anaemic complexion with a roseate hue. Her eyes were bright, her nerves steady, her step brisk ; and she began to take some interest in life, and in those around her. Lucy presented her mother to the bishop with an unconcealed pride, which was surely pardonable.

'There, papa,' she said proudly, while the bishop was lost in wonder at this marvellous transformation. 'What do you think of my patient now ?'

'My dear, it is wonderful ! The Nauheim spring is the true fountain of youth.'

'A very prosaic fountain, I am afraid,' laughed Mrs Pendle ; 'the treatment is not poetical.'

'It is at least magical, my love. I must dip in these restorative waters myself, lest I should

be taken rather for your father than your—Here Dr Pendle, recollecting the falsity of the unspoken word, shut his mouth with a qualm of deadly sickness—what the Scotch call a *grieve*.

Mrs Pendle, however, observant rather of his looks than his words, did not notice the unfinished sentence. 'You look as though you needed a course,' she said anxiously ; 'if I have grown younger, you have become older. This is just what happens when I am away. You can never look after yourself, dear.'

Not feeling inclined to spoil the first joy of reunion, Dr Pendle turned aside this speech with a laugh, and postponed his explanation until a more fitting moment. In the meantime, George and Gabriel and Harry were hovering round the returned travellers with attentions and questions and frequent congratulations. Mr Cargrim, who had been sulking ever since the arrest of Mosk had overthrown his plans, was not present to spoil this pleasant family party, and the bishop spent a golden hour or so of unalloyed joy. But as the night wore on, this evanescent pleasure passed away, and when alone with Mrs Pendle in her boudoir, he was so gloomy and depressed that she insisted upon learning the cause of his melancholy.

'There must be something seriously wrong, George,' she said earnestly ; 'if there is, you need not hesitate to tell me.'

'Can you bear to hear the truth, Amy ? Are you strong enough ?'

'There *is* something serious the matter, then ?' cried Mrs Pendle, the colour ebbing from her cheeks. 'What is it, George ? Tell me at once. I can bear anything but this suspense.'

'Amy !' The bishop sat down on the couch beside his wife, and took her hand in his warm, encouraging clasp. 'You shall know all, my dearest ; and may God strengthen you to bear the knowledge.'

'George ! I—I am calm ; I am strong ; tell me what you mean.'

The bishop clasped her in his arms, held her head to his breast, and in low, rapid tones related all that had taken place since the night of the reception. He did not spare himself in the recital ; he concealed nothing, he added nothing, but calmly, coldly, mercilessly told of Krant's return, of Krant's blackmail, of Krant's terrible end. Thence he passed on to talk of Cargrim's suspicions, of Baltic's arrival, of Mosk's arrest, and of the latter's promise to keep the secret of which he had so wickedly become possessed. Having told the past, he discussed the present, and made arrangements for the future. 'Only Gabriel and myself and Graham know the truth now, dearest,' he concluded, 'for this unhappy man Mosk may be already accounted as one dead. Next week you and I must take a journey to some distant parish in the west of England,

and there become man and wife for the second time. Gabriel will keep silent; George and Lucy need never know the truth; and so, my dearest, all things—at least to the public eye—shall be as they were. You need not grieve, Amy, or accuse yourself unjustly. If we have sinned, we have sinned innocently, and the burden of evil cannot be laid on you or me. Stephen Krant is to blame; and he has paid for his wickedness with his life. So far as we may—so far as we are able—we must right the wrong. God has afflicted us, my dearest; but God has also protected us; therefore let us thank Him with humble hearts for His many mercies. He will strengthen us to bear the burden; through Him we shall do valiantly. “For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.”

How wonderful are women! For weeks Bishop Pendle had been dreading this interview with his delicate, nervous, sensitive wife. He had expected tears, sighs, loud sorrow, bursts of hysterical weeping, the wringing of hands, and all the undisciplined grief of the feminine nature. But the unexpected occurred, as it invariably does with the sex in question. To the bishop's unconcealed amazement, Mrs Pendle neither wept nor fainted; she controlled her emotion with a power of will which he had never credited her with possessing, and her first thought was not for herself, but for her companion in misfortune. Placing her hands on either side of the bishop's face, she kissed him fondly, tenderly, pityingly.

“My poor darling, how you must have suffered!” she said softly. “Why did you not tell me of this long ago, so that I might share your sorrow?”

“I was afraid—afraid to—to speak, Amy, gasped the bishop, overwhelmed by her extraordinary composure.

“You need not have been afraid, George. I am no fair-weather wife.”

“Alas! alas!” sighed the bishop.

“I am your wife,” cried Mrs Pendle, answering his thought after the manner of women; “that wicked, cruel man died to me thirty years ago.”

“In the eyes of the law, my—”

“In the eyes of God I am your wife,” interrupted Mrs Pendle, vehemently; “for over twenty-five years we have been all in all to one another. I bear your name, I am the mother of your children. Do you think these things won't outweigh the claims of that wretch, who ill-treated and deserted me, who lied about his death, and extorted money for his forgery? To satisfy your scruples I am willing to marry you again; but to my mind there is no need, even though that brute came back from the grave to create it. He—”

“Amy! Amy! the man is dead!”

“I know he is; he died thirty years ago. Don't tell me otherwise. I am married to

you, and my children can hold up their heads with anyone. If Stephen Krant had come to me with his villainous tempting, I should have defied him, scorned him, trod him under foot.” She rose in a tempest of passion and stamped on the carpet.

“He would have told; he would have disgraced us.”

“There can be no disgrace in innocence,” flashed out Mrs Pendle, fierily. “We married, you and I, in all good faith. He was reported dead; you saw his grave. I deny that the man came to life.”

“You cannot deny facts,” said the bishop, shaking his head.

“Can't I? I'd deny anything so far as that wretch is concerned. He fascinated me when I was a weak, foolish girl, as a serpent fascinates a bird. He married me for my money; and when it was gone his love went with it. He treated me like the low-minded brute he was; you know he did, George, you know he did. When he was shot in Alsace, I thanked God. I did! I did! I did!”

“Hush, Amy, hush!” said Dr Pendle, trying to soothe her excitement, “you will make yourself ill!”

“No, I won't, George; I am as calm as you are; I can't help feeling excited. I wished to forget that man and the unhappy life he led me. I did forget him in your love and in the happiness of our children. It was the sight of that student with the scarred face that made me think of him. Why, oh, why did I speak about him to Lucy and Gabriel? Why? Why?”

“You were thoughtless, my dear.”

“I was mad, George, mad; I should have held my tongue, but I didn't. And my poor boy knows the truth. You should have denied it.”

“I could not deny it.”

“Ah! you have not a mother's heart. I would have denied, and lied, and swore its falsity on the Bible sooner than that one of my darlings should have known of it.”

“Amy! Amy! you are out of your mind to speak like this. I deny what is true? I, a priest?—a—”

“You are a man before everything—a man and a father.”

“And a servant of the Most High,” rebuked the bishop, sternly.

“Well, you look on it in a different light to what I do. You suffered; I should not have suffered. I don't suffer now; I am not going back thirty years to make my heart ache.” She paused and clenched her hands. “Are you sure that he is dead?” she asked harshly.

“Quite sure; dead and buried. There can be no doubt about it this time!”

“Is it necessary that we should marry again?”

“Absolutely necessary,” said the bishop, decisively.

“Then the sooner we get it over the better,”

replied Mrs Pendle, petulantly. 'Here'—she wrenched the wedding ring off her finger—'take this! I have no right to wear it. Neither maid, wife, nor widow, what should I do with a ring?' and she began to laugh.

'Stop that, Amy!' cried the bishop, sharply, for he saw that, after all, she was becoming hysterical. 'Put the ring again on your finger, until such time as I can replace it by another. You are Krant's widow, and as his widow I shall marry you next week.'

As a drop of cold water let fall into boiling coffee causes the bubbling to subside, so did these few stern words cool down Mrs Pendle's excitement. She overcame her emotion; she replaced the ring on her finger, and again resumed her seat by the bishop. 'My poor dear George,' said she, smoothing his white hair, 'you are not angry with me?'

'Not angry, Amy; but I am rather vexed that you should speak so bitterly.'

'Well, darling, I won't speak bitterly again. Stephen is dead, so do not let us think about him any more. Next week we shall marry again, and all our troubles will be at an end.'

'They will, please God,' said the bishop, solemnly; 'and oh, Amy, dearest, let us thank Him for His great mercy.'

'Do you think He has been merciful?' asked Mrs Pendle, doubtfully, for her religious emotion was not strong enough to blind her to the stubborn fact that their troubles had been undeserved, that they were innocent sinners.

'Most merciful,' murmured the bishop, bowing his head. 'Has He not shown us how to expiate our sin?'

'Our sin? no, George, I won't agree to that. We have not sinned. We married in the fullest belief that Stephen was dead.'

'My dear, all that is past and done with. Let us look to the future, and thank the Almighty that He has delivered us out of our troubles.'

'Yes, I thank Him for that, George,' said Mrs Pendle, meekly enough.

'That is my own dear Amy,' answered the bishop; and producing his pocket Bible, he opened it at random. His eye alighted on a verse of Jeremiah, which he read out with thankful emotion.—

'And I will deliver thee out of the hand of the wicked; and I will redeem thee out of the hand of the terrible.'

CHAPTER XXXVII

DEA EX MACHINÂ

As may be guessed, Captain Pendle, now that the course of true love ran smoother, was an assiduous visitor to the Jenny Wren

house. He and Mab were all in all to one another, and in the egotism of their love did not trouble themselves about the doings of their neighbours. It is true that George was relieved and pleased to hear of Mosk's arrest and confession, because Gabriel was thereby exonerated from all suspicion of having committed a vile crime; but when reassured on this point, he ceased to interest himself in the matter. He was ignorant that his brother loved Bell Mosk, as neither Baltic nor the bishop had so far enlightened him, else he might not have been quite so indifferent to the impending trial of the wretched criminal. As it was, the hot excitement prevalent in Beorminster left him cold, and both he and Mab might have been dwellers in the moon for all the interest they displayed in the topic of the day. They lived, according to the selfish custom of lovers, in an Arcadia of their own creation, and were oblivious to the doings beyond its borders. / Which disregard was natural enough in their then state of mind.

However, George, being in the world and of the world, occasionally brought to Mab such scraps of news as he thought might interest her. He told her of his mother's return, of her renewed health, of her pleasure in hearing that the engagement had been sanctioned by the bishop, and delivered a message to the effect that she wished to see and embrace her future daughter-in-law—all of which information gave Mab wondrous pleasure and Miss Whichello a considerable amount of satisfaction, since she saw that there would be no further question of her niece's unsuitability for George.

'You deserve some reward for your good news,' said Mab, and produced a silk knitted necktie of martial red, 'so here it is!'

'Dearest,' cried Captain Pendle, kissing the scarf, 'I shall wear it next to my heart; then, thinking the kiss wasted on irresponsible silk, he transferred it to the cheek of his lady-love.

'Nonsense!' said Miss Whichello, smiling broadly; 'wear it round your neck like a sensible lover.'

'Are lovers ever sensible?' inquired the captain, with a twinkle.

'I know one who isn't,' cried Mab, playfully. 'No, sir,' removing an eager arm, 'you will shock aunty.'

'Aunty has become hardened to such shocks,' smiled Miss Whichello.

'Aunty has been as melancholy as an owl of late,' retorted Mab, caressing the old lady; 'ever since the arrest of that man Mosk she has been quite wretched.'

'Don't speak of him, Mab.'

'Halloo!' said George, with sudden recollection, 'I knew there was something else to tell you. Mosk is dead.'

Miss Whichello gave a faint shriek, and tightly clasped the hand of her niece.

'Dead!' she gasped, pale-cheeked and low-toned. 'Mosk dead!'

'As a door nail,' rejoined George, admiring his present; 'he hanged himself last night with his braces, so the gallows have lost a victim and Beorminster society a sensation trial of—'

'George!' cried Mab, in alarm, 'don't talk so, you will make aunty faint.'

And indeed the little old lady looked as though she were on the point of swooning. Her face was white, her skin was cold, and leaning back her head she had closed her eyes. Captain Pendle's item of news had produced so unexpected a result that he and Mab stared at one another in surprise.

'You shouldn't tell these horrors, George.'

'My love, how was I to know your aunt took an interest in the man?'

'I don't take an interest in him,' protested Miss Whichello, faintly; 'but he killed Jenthal, and now he kills himself; it's horrible.'

'Horrible but necessary,' assented George, cheerfully; 'a man who murders another can't expect to get off scot-free. Mosk has only done for himself what the law would have done for him. I'm sorry for Baltic, however.'

'The missionary! Why, George?'

'Because this suicide will be such a disappointment to him. He has been trying to make the poor devil—beg pardon—poor wretch repent; but it would seem that he has not been successful.'

'Did he not confess to Mr Baltic?' asked Miss Whichello, anxiously.

'I believe so; he repented that far.'

'Do you know what he told him?'

'That he had killed Jenthal, and had stolen his money.'

'Did he say if he had found any papers on Jenthal's body?'

'Not that I know of,' replied George, staring. 'Why! had Jenthal any particular papers in his possession?'

'Oh, I don't know; I really can't say,' answered Miss Whichello, confusedly, and rose unsteadily to her feet. 'Mab, my dear, you will excuse me, I am not very well; I shall go to my bedroom.'

'Let me come too, aunty.'

'No! no!' Miss Whichello waved her niece back. 'I wish to be alone,' and she left the room abruptly, without a look at either of the young people. They could not understand this strange behaviour. Mab, woman-like, turned on Captain Pendle.

'It is all your fault, George, talking of murders and suicides.'

'I'm awfully sorry,' said the captain, penitently, 'but I thought you would like to hear the news.'

'Not the police news, thank you,' said Mab, with dignity.

'Why not? Something to talk about, you know.'

'You have me to talk about, Captain Pendle.'

'Oh!' George sprang forward. 'Let us discuss that subject at once. You deserve some punishment for calling me out of my name. There, wicked one!'

'George,' very faintly, 'I—I shall not allow it! You—you should ask permission.'

'Waste of time,' said the practical George, and slipped his arm round her waist.

'Oh, indeed!'—indignantly—'well, I—' Here Captain Pendle punished her again, after which Mab said that he was like all men, that he ought to be ashamed of himself, etc., etc., etc. Then she frowned, then she smiled, and finally became a meek and patient Grissel to the unfeigned delight of the superior mind. So the pair forgot Mosk and his wretched death, forgot Miss Whichello and her strange conduct, and retreated from the world into their Arcadia—Paradise—Elysium, in which it is best that all sensible people should leave this pair of foolish lovers.

Miss Whichello had other things to think of than this billing and cooing. She went to her bedroom, and lay down for ten minutes or so; then she got up again and began pacing restlessly to and fro. Her thoughts were busy with Mosk, with his victim, with Baltic; she wondered if Jenthal had been in possession of certain papers, if these had been stolen by Mosk, if they were now in the pocket of Baltic. This last idea made her blood turn cold and her heart drum a loud tattoo. She covered her face with her hands; she sat down, she rose up, and in a nervous fever of apprehension leaned against the wall. Then, after the manner of those over-wrought, she began to talk aloud.

'I must tell someone; I must have advice,' she muttered, clenching her hands. 'It is of no use seeing Mr Baltic; he is a stranger; he may refuse to help me. Dr Graham? No! he is too cynical. The bishop?' She paused and struck her hands lightly together. 'The bishop! I shall see him and tell him all. For his son's sake, he will help my poor darling.'

Having made up her mind to this course, Miss Whichello put on her old-fashioned silk cloak and poke bonnet. Then she fished a bundle of papers, yellow with age, out of a tin box, and slipped them into her capacious pocket. Biting her lips and rubbing her cheeks to bring back the colour, she glided downstairs, stole past the drawing-room door like a guilty creature, and in another minute was in the square. Here she took a passing fly, and ordered the man to drive her to the palace as speedily as possible.

'I trust I am acting for the best,' murmured the little old lady, with a sigh. 'I think I am; for if Bishop Pendle cannot help me, no one else can. After thirty years, oh God! my poor, poor darling!'

In the Greek drama, when the affairs of the

dramatis persona became so entangled by circumstance, or fate, or sheer folly as to be beyond their capability of reducing them to order, those involved in such disorder were accustomed to summon a deity to accomplish what was impossible for mortals to achieve. Then stepped the god out of a machine to redress the wrong and reward the right, to separate the sheep from the goats and to deliver a moral speech to the audience, commanding them to note how impossible it was for man to dispense with the guidance and judgment and powerful aid of the Olympian Hierarchy. Miss Whichello's mission was something similar; and although both she and Bishop Pendle were ignorant that she represented the 'goddess out of a machine' who was to settle all things in a way conducive to the happiness of all persons, yet such was the case. Impelled by Fate, she sought out the very man to whom her mission was most acceptable; and seated face to face with Bishop Pendle in that library which had been the scene of so many famous interviews, she unconsciously gave him a piece of information which put an end to all his troubles. She had certainly arrived at the eleventh hour, and might just as well have presented herself earlier; but Destiny, the playwright of the Universe, always decrees that her dramas should play their appointed time and never permits her arbitrator to appear until immediately before the fall of the green curtain. So far as the Beaminster drama was concerned, the crucial moment was at hand, the actor—or rather actress—who was to remedy all things was on the scene, and shortly the curtain would fall on a situation of the rough made smooth. Then red fire, marriage bells, triumphant virtue and cowering guilt, with a rhyming tag, delivered by the prettiest actress, of 'All's well that ends well!'

'I come to consult you confidentially,' said Miss Whichello, when she and the bishop were alone in the library. 'I wish to ask for your advice.'

'My advice and my friendship are both at your service, my dear lady,' replied the courteous bishop.

'It is about Mab's parents,' blurted out the little old lady.

'Oh!' The bishop looked grave. 'You are about to tell me the truth of those rumours which were prevalent in Beaminster when you brought Miss Arden home to your house.'

'Yes. I daresay Mrs Pansey said all sorts of wicked things about me, bishop?'

'Well, no!'—Dr Pendle wriggled uneasily—'she spoke rather of your sister than of you. I do not wish to repeat scandal, Miss Whichello, so let us say no more about the matter. Your niece shall marry my son; be assured of that. It is foolish to rake up the past,' added the bishop, with a sigh.

'I must rake up the past; I must tell you the truth,' said Miss Whichello, in firm tones,

'if only to put a stop to Mrs Pansey's evil tongue. What did she say, bishop?'

'Really, really, my dear lady, I—'

'Bishop, tell me what she said about my sister. I will know.'

Reluctantly the bishop spoke out at this direct request. 'She said that your sister had eloped in London with a man who afterwards refused to marry her, that she had a child, and that such child is your niece, Miss Arden, whom you brought to Beaminster after the death of your unhappy sister.'

'A fine mixture of truth and fiction indeed,' said the old lady, in a haughty voice. 'I am obliged to Mrs Pansey for the way in which she has distorted facts.'

'I fear, indeed, that Mrs Pansey exaggerates,' said Dr Pendle, shaking his head.

'With all due respect, bishop, she is a wicked old Sapphira!' cried Miss Whichello, and forthwith produced a bundle of papers out of her pocket. 'My unfortunate sister Annie did run away, but she was married to her lover on the very day she left our house in London, and my darling Mab is as legitimate as your son George, Dr Pendle.'

The bishop winced at this unlucky illustration. 'Have you a proof of this marriage, Miss Whichello?' he asked, with a glance at the papers.

'Of course I have,' she replied, untying the red tape with trembling fingers. 'Here is the certificate of marriage which my poor Annie gave me on her dying bed. I would have shown it before to all Beaminster had I known of Mrs Pansey's false reports. Look at it, bishop.' She thrust it into his hand. 'Ann Whichello, spinster; Pharaoh Bosville, bachelor. They were married in St Chad's Church, Hampstead, in the month of December 1869. Here is Mab's certificate of birth; she was christened in the same church, and born in 1870, the year of the Franco-German war, so as this is ninety-seven, she is now twenty-seven years of age, just two years older than your son, Captain Pendle.'

With much interest the bishop examined the two certificates of birth and marriage which Miss Whichello placed before him. They were both legally perfect, and he saw plainly that however badly Bosville might have behaved afterwards to Ann Bosville, she was undoubtedly his wife.

'Not that he would have married her if he could have helped it,' went on Miss Whichello, while the bishop looked at the documents 'but Annie had a little money—not much—which she was to receive on her wedding day, so the wretch married her and wrote to my dear father for the money, which, of course, under grandfather's will, had to be paid. Father never would see Annie again, but when the poor darling wrote to me a year afterwards that she was dying with a little child by her side, what could I do but go and comfort her? Ah, poor darling Annie!'

sobbed the little old lady, 'she was sadly changed from the bright, beautiful girl I remembered. Her husband turned out a brute and a ruffian and a spendthrift. He wasted all her money, and left her within six months of the marriage—the wretch! Annie tried to support herself by needlework, but she took cold in her starving condition and broke down. Then Mab was born, and she wrote to me. I went at once, bishop, but arrived just in time to get those papers and close my dear Annie's eyes. Afterwards I brought Mab back with me to Beaminster, but I kept her for some time in London on account of my father. When I did bring her here, and I showed him the marriage certificate, he got quite fond of the little pet. So all these years Mab has lived with me quite like my own sweet child, and your son is a lucky man to win her love,' added the old maid, rather incoherently. 'It is not everyone that I would give my dear Annie's child to, I can tell you, bishop. So that's the whole story, and a sadly common one it is.'

'It does you great credit, Miss Whichello,' said Dr Pendle, patting her hand; 'and I have the highest respect both for you and your niece. I am proud, my dear lady, that she should become my daughter. But tell me how your unhappy sister became acquainted with this man?'

'He was a violinist,' replied Miss Whichello, 'a public violinist, and played most beautifully. Annie heard him and saw him, and lost her head over his looks and genius. He called himself Amaru, but his real name was Pharaoh Bosvile.'

'A strange name, Miss Whichello.'

'It is a gipsy name, bishop. Bosvile was a gipsy. He learned the violin in Hungary or Spain, I don't know which, and played wonderfully. Afterwards he had an accident which hurt his hand, and he could not play; that was the reason he married Annie—just for her money, the wretch!'

'A gipsy,' murmured the bishop, who had turned pale.

'Yes; an English gipsy, but like all those people he wandered far and near. The accident which hurt his hand also marked his cheek with a scar.'

'The right cheek?' gasped Dr Pendle, leaning forward.

'Why, yes,' said Miss Whichello, rather astonished at the bishop's emotion: 'that was how I recognised him here when he called himself Jentham. He—'

With a cry the bishop sprang to his feet in a state of uncontrollable agitation, shaking and white. 'W—wa; Jentham—Bos—Bosvile?' he stammered. 'Are—are you sure?'

'I am certain,' replied Miss Whichello, with a scared look. 'I have seen him dozens of times. Bishop!' Her voice rose in a scream, for Dr Pendle had fallen forward on his desk.

'Oh, my God!' cried the bishop. 'Oh, God most merciful!'

The little old lady was trembling violently. She thought that the bishop had suddenly gone out of his mind. Nor was she reassured when he stood up and looked at her with a face, down which the tears were streaming. Never had Miss Whichello seen a man weeping before, and the sight terrified her much more than an outburst of anger would have done. She looked at the bishop, he looked at her, and they were both ashy white, both overcome with nervous emotion.

After a moment the bishop opened a drawer and took out a bundle of papers. Out of these he selected the marriage certificate of his wife and Krant, and compared it with the certificate of Pharaoh Bosvile and Ann Whichello.

'Thank God!' he said again, in a tremulous voice. 'This man as Bosvile married your sister in 1869, as Krant he married Mrs Pendle in 1870.'

'Married Mrs Pendle!' shrieked Miss Whichello, darting forward.

'Yes. She was a Mrs Krant when I married her, and as her husband was reported dead, I believed her to be his widow.'

'But she was not his widow!'

'No, for Krant was Jentham, and Jentham was alive after my marriage.'

'I don't mean that,' cried Miss Whichello, laying a finger on her sister's certificate, 'but Jentham as Bosvile married Annie in 1869.'

'He married my wife in October 1870,' said the bishop, breathlessly.

'Then his second marriage was a false one,' said Miss Whichello, 'for in that year, in that month, my sister was still alive. Mrs Pendle was never his wife.'

'No, thank God!' said the bishop, clasping his hands, 'she is my own true wife after all.'

CHAPTER XXXVIII

EXIT MR CARGRIM

ONCE informed of the welcome truth, Dr Pendle lost no time in having it verified by documents and extraneous evidence. This was not the affair of hours, but of days, since it entailed a visit to St Chad's Church at Hampstead, and a rigorous examination of the original marriage and death certificates. Also, as Bosvile, *alias* Krant, *alias* Jentham was said to be a gipsy on the authority of Miss Whichello, and as the information that Baltic was in the confidence of Mother Jael had trickled through Brace and Graham to the bishop, the last named considered it advisable that the ex-sailor should be informed of the actual truth. Now that Dr

Pendle was personally satisfied of the legality of his marriage, he had no hesitation in acquainting Baltic with his life-history, particularly as the man could obtain from Mother Jael an assurance, in writing if necessary, that Bosvile and Jentham were one and the same. For the satisfaction of all parties concerned, it was indispensable that proof positive should be procured, and the matter settled beyond all doubt. The position, as affecting both the private feelings and social status of Bishop and Mrs Pendle, was too serious a one to be dealt with otherwise than in the most circumspect manner.

After Miss Whichello's visit and revelation, Dr Pendle immediately sought out his wife to explain that after all doubts and difficulties, and lies and forgeries, they were as legally bound to one another as any couple in the three Kingdoms; that their children were legitimate and could bear their father's name, and that the evil which had survived the death of its author was now but shadow and wind—in a word, non-existent. Mrs Pendle, who had borne the shock of her pseudo husband's resurrection so bravely, was quite overwhelmed by the good news of her re-established position, and fainted outright when her husband broke it to her. But for Lucy's sake—as the bishop did not wish Lucy to know, or even suspect anything—she afterwards controlled her feelings better, and, relieved from the apprehension of coming danger, speedily recovered her health and spirits. She was thus, at a week's end, enabled to attend in the library a council of six people summoned by her husband to adjust the situation. The good bishop was nothing if not methodical and thorough; and he was determined that the matter of the false and true marriages should be threshed out to the last grain. Therefore, the council was held *ex aequo et bono*.

On this momentous occasion there were present the bishop himself and Mrs Pendle, who sat close beside his chair; also Miss Whichello, fluttered and anxious, in juxtaposition with Dr Graham; and Gabriel, who had placed himself near Baltic, the sedate and solemn-faced. When all were assembled, the bishop lost no time in speaking of the business which had brought them together. He related in detail the imposture of Jentham, the murder by Mosk, who since had taken his own life, and the revelation of Miss Whichello, ending with the production of the documents proving the several marriages, and a short statement explaining the same.

'Here,' said Dr Pendle, 'is the certificate of marriage between Pharaoh Bosvile and Ann Whichello, dated December 1869. They lived together as man and wife for six months up to May 1870, after which Bosvile deserted the unhappy lady.'

'After spending all her money, the wretch!' put in Miss Whichello, angrily.

'Bosvile!' continued the bishop, 'had previously made the acquaintance of my wife, then Amy Lancaster, under the false name of Stephen Krant; and so far won her love that, thinking him a single man, she consented to marry him.'

'No, bishop,' contradicted Mrs Pendle, very positively, 'he did not win my love; he fascinated me with his good looks and charming manners, for in spite of the scar on his cheek Stephen was very handsome. Some friend introduced him to my father as a Hungarian exile hiding under the name of Krant from Austrian vengeance; and my father, enthusiastic on the subject of patriotism, admitted him to our house. I was then a weak, foolish girl, and his wicked brilliancy drew me towards him. When he learned that I had money of my own he proposed to marry me. My father objected, but I was infatuated by Stephen's arts, and became his wife in October 1870.'

'Quite so, my love,' assented her husband, mildly; 'as an inexperienced girl you were at the mercy of that Belial. You were married as you say in October 1870; here, to prove that statement, is the certificate, and the bishop passed it to Baltic. But at the time of such marriage Mrs Bosvile was still alive. Miss Whichello can vouch for this important fact!'

'Ah! that I can,' sighed the little old lady, shaking her head. 'My poor darling sister did not die until January 1871, and I was present to close her weary—wary eyes. Is not that the certificate of her death you are holding?'

'Yes,' answered the bishop, simply, and gave the paper into her outstretched hand. 'You can now understand, my friends,' he continued, addressing the company generally, 'that as Mrs Bosvile was alive in October 1870, the marriage which her husband then contracted with Miss Lancaster was a false one.'

'That is clear enough,' murmured the attentive Baltic, nodding.

'It thus appears,' resumed the bishop, concisely, 'that when I married—as I thought—Amy Krant, a widow, in September 1871, I really and truly wedded Amy Lancaster, a spinster. Therefore this lady—and here the bishop clasped tenderly the hand of Mrs Pendle—is my true, dear wife, and has been legally so these many years, notwithstanding Bosvile's infamous assertion to the contrary.'

'Thank God! thank God!' cried Mrs Pendle, with joyful tears. 'Gabriel, my darling boy!' and she stretched out her disengaged hand to caress her son. Gabriel kissed it with unconcealed emotion.

In the meantime, Dr Graham was examining the bishop's marriage certificate with sharp attention, as he thought he espied a flaw. 'Pardon me, my dear Pendle,' said

he, in his crisp voice, 'but I see that Mrs Pendle became your wife under a name which we now know was not then her own. Does that false name vitiate the marriage?'

'By no means,' replied the bishop, promptly. 'I took counsel's opinion on that point, when I was in London. It is as follows'—and Dr Pendle read an extract from a legal-looking document. '"A marriage which is made in ignorance in a false name is perfectly good. The law on the subject appears to be this—If a person, to conceal his or her identity, assumes either a wrong name or description, so as to practically obtain a secret marriage, the marriage is void; but if the wrong name or description is adopted by accident or innocently, the marriage is good." Therefore,' added Dr Pendle, placing the paper on one side, 'Mrs Pendle was not Bosvile's wife on two distinct grounds. Firstly, because his true wife was alive when he married her. Secondly, because he fraudulently made her his wife by giving a false name and description. Regarding my own marriage, it is a good one in law, because Mrs Pendle's false name of Krant was adopted in all innocence. There is no count in the realm of Great Britain,' concluded the bishop, with conviction, 'that would not uphold my marriage as true and lawful, and God be thanked that such is the case!'

'God be thanked!' said Gabriel, in his turn, and said it with heartfelt earnestness. Graham, bubbling over with pleasure, jumped up in his restless way, and gave a friendly hand in turn to Dr Pendle and his wife. 'I congratulate you both, my dear friends,' said he, not without emotion. 'You have won through your troubles at last, and can now live in much-deserved peace for the rest of your lives. *Deus nobis haec otia fecit!* Hey, Bishop, you know the Mantuan. Well, well, you have paid forfeit to the gods, Pendle, and they will no longer envy your good fortune, or seek to destroy it.'

'Graham, Graham,' said the bishop, with some tolerance, 'always these Pagan sentiments.'

'Ay! ay! I am a Pagan suckled in a creed outworn,' quoted the doctor, rubbing his hands. 'Well, we cannot all be bishops.'

'We can all be Christians,' said Baltic, gravely.

'Ah!' retorted Graham. 'What we should be, and what we are, Mr Baltic, are points capable of infinite discussion. At present we should be smiling and thankful, which,' added he, breaking off, 'Miss Whichello is not, I regret to see.'

'I am thinking of my poor sister,' sobbed the old lady. 'How do I know but that the villain did not deceive her also by making her his wife under a false name?'

'No, madam!' interposed Baltic, eagerly. 'Bosvile was the man's true name, therefore he was legally your sister's husband. I wrote down a statement by Mother Jael that Jentham

was really Pharaoh Bosvile, and, at my request, she signed the same. Here it is, signed by her and witnessed by me. I shall give it to you, my lord, that you may lock it up safely with those certificates.'

'Thank you, Mr Baltic,' said the bishop, taking the slip of paper tendered by the missionary, 'but I trust that—er—that this woman knows little of the truth.'

'She knows nothing, my lord, save that Bosvile, for his own purposes, took the names of Amaru and Jentham at different times. The rogue was cunning enough to keep his own counsel of his life amongst the Gentiles; of his marriages, false and true, Mother Jael is ignorant. Set your mind at rest, sir, she will never trouble you in any way.'

'Good!' said Dr Pendle, drawing a long breath of relief. 'Then, as such is the case, my friends, I think it advisable that we should keep our knowledge of Bosvile's iniquities to ourselves. I do not wish my son George or my daughter Lucy to learn the sad story of the past. Such knowledge would only vex them unnecessarily.'

'And I'm sure I don't want Mab to know what a villain her father was,' broke in Miss Whichello. 'Thank God she is unlike him in every way, save that she takes after him in looks. When Captain Pendle talks of Mab's rich Eastern beauty, I shiver all over; he little knows that he speaks the truth, and that Mab has Arab blood in her veins.'

'Not Arab blood, my dear lady,' cried Graham, alertly; 'the gipsies do not come from Arabia, but, as is believed, from the north of India. They appeared in Europe about the fifteenth century, calling themselves, falsely enough, Egyptians. But both Borrow and Leland are agreed that—'

'I don't want to hear about the gipsies,' interrupted Miss Whichello, cutting short the doctor's disquisition; 'all I know is, that if Bosvile or Jentham, or whatever he called himself, is a sample of them, they are a wicked lot of Moabites. I wonder the bishop lets his son marry the child of one, I do indeed!'

'Dear Miss Whichello,' said Mrs Pendle, putting her arm round the poor lady's neck, 'both the bishop and myself are proud that Mab should become our daughter and George's wife. And after all,' she added naively, 'neither of them will ever know the truth!'

'I hope not, I'm sure,' wept Miss Whichello. 'I buried that miserable man at my own expense, as he was Mab's father. And I have had a stone put up to him, with his last name, "Jentham," inscribed on it, so that no one might ask questions, which would have been asked had I written his real name.'

'No one will ask questions,' said the bishop, soothingly, 'and if they do, no answers will be forthcoming; we are all agreed on that point.'

'Quite agreed,' answered Baltic, as spokesman for the rest; 'we shall let the dead past bury its dead, and God bless the future.'

'Amen!' said Dr Pendle, and bowed his grey head in a silence more eloquent than words.

So far the rough was made smooth, with as much skill as could be exercised by mortal brains; but after Dr Pendle had dismissed his friends there yet remained to him an unpleasant task, the performance of which, in justice to himself, could not longer be postponed. This was the punishment and dismissal of Michael Cargrim, who indeed merited little leniency at the hands of the man whose confidence he had so shamefully abused. Serpents should be crushed, traitors should be punished, however unpleasant may be the exercise of the judicial function; for to permit evil men to continue in their evil-doing is to encourage vicious habits detrimental to the well-being of humanity. The more just the judge, the more severe should he be towards such calculating sinners, lest, infected by example, mankind should become even more corrupt than it is. Bishop Pendle was a kindly man, who wished to think the best of his fellow-creatures, and usually did so; but he could not blind himself to the base and plotting nature of Cargrim; and, for the sake of his family, for the well-being of the Church, for the benefit of the schemer himself, he summoned him to receive rebuke and punishment. He was not now the patron, the benefactor; but the judge, the ecclesiastical superior, severe and impartial.

Cargrim obeyed the summons unwillingly enough, as he knew very well that he was about to receive the righteous reward of his deeds. A day or so before, when lamenting to Baltic that Dr Pendle had proved innocent, the man had rebuked him for his baseness, and had given him to understand that the bishop was fully aware of the contemptible part which he had acted. Deserted by his former ally, ignorant of Dr Pendle's secret, convinced of Mosk's guilt, the chaplain was in anything but a pleasant position. He was reaping what he had so industriously sown; he was caught in his own snare, and saw no way of defending his conduct. In a word, he was ruined, and now stood before his injured superior with pale face and hanging head, ready to be blamed and sentenced without uttering one word on his own behalf. Nor, had he possessed the insolence to do so, could he have thought of that one necessary word.

'Michael,' said the bishop, mildly, 'I have been informed by Mr Baltic that you accused me of a terrible crime. May I ask on what grounds you did so?'

Cargrim made no reply, but, flushing and paling alternately, looked shamefaced at the carpet.

'I must answer myself, I see,' continued Dr Pendle, after a short silence; 'you thought that because I met Jentharn on the heath to pay him some money I murdered him in the viciousness of my heart. Why should you think so ill of me, my poor boy? Have I not stood in the

place of your father? Have I not treated you as my own son? You know that I have. And my reward is, that these many weeks you have been secretly trying to ruin me. Even had I been guilty,' cried the bishop, raising his voice, 'it was not your place to proclaim the shame of one who has cherished you. If you had such wicked thoughts in your heart, why did you not come boldly before me and accuse me to my face? I should then have known how to answer you. I can forgive malice—yes, even malice—but not deceit. Did you never think of my delicate wife, of my innocent family, when plotting and scheming my ruin with a smiling face? Alas! alas! Michael, how could you act in a way so unworthy of a Christian, of a gentleman?'

'What is the use of crying over spilt milk?' said Cargrim, doggedly. 'You have the advantage now and can do what you will.'

'What do you mean by talking like that?' said the bishop, sternly. 'Have the advantage now indeed; I never lost the advantage, sir, so far as you are concerned. I did not murder that wretched man, for you know that Mosk confessed how he shot him for the sake of the money I gave him. I knew of Jentharn in other days, under another name, and when he asked me for money I gave it to him. My reason for doing so I do not choose to tell you, Mr Cargrim. It is not your right to question my actions. I am not only your elder, but your ecclesiastic superior, to whom, as a priest, you are bound to yield obedience. That obedience I now exact. You must suffer for your sins.'

'You can't hurt me,' returned Cargrim, with defiance.

'I have no wish to hurt you,' answered the bishop, mildly; 'but for your own good you must be punished; and punish you I will so far as lies in my power.'

'I am ready to be punished, my lord; you have the whip hand, so I must submit.'

'Michael, Michael, harden not your heart! Repent of your wickedness if it is in you to do so. I cannot spare you if I would. *Bonis nocet quis quis pepercerit malis*; that is a true saying which, as a priest, I should obey, and which I intend to obey if only for your own benefit. After punishment comes repentance and amendment.'

Cargrim scowled. 'It is no use talking further, my lord,' he said roughly. 'As I have acted like a fool, I must take a fool's wages.'

'You are indeed a fool,' rejoined the bishop, coldly, 'and an ungrateful fool to boot, or you would not thus answer one who has your interest at heart. But as you take up such a position, I shall be brief. You must leave my house at once, and, for very shame, I should advise you to leave the Church.'

'Leave the Church?' echoed Cargrim, in dismay.

'I have said it. As a bishop, I cannot entrust to a guilty man the care of immortal souls.'

'Guilty? I am guilty of nothing.'

'Do you call malice, falsehood, dissimulation nothing?'

'You cannot unfrock me for what I have done,' said Cargrim, evading a direct reply. 'You may have the will, but you have not the power.'

Dr Pendle looked at him in amazement. 'Yours is indeed an evil heart, when you can use such language to me,' he said sorrowfully. 'I see that it is useless to argue with you in your present fallen condition.'

'Fallen condition, my lord?'

'Yes, poor lad! fallen not only as a priest, but as a man. However, I shall plead no more. Go where you will, do what you will, although I advise you once more not to insult an offended God by offering prayers for others which you need for yourself. Yet, as I am unwilling that you should starve, I shall instruct my banker in London to pay you a monthly sum of money until you are beyond want. Now go, Michael. I am bitterly disappointed in you; and by your own acts you have put it out of my power to keep you by my side. Go! Repent—and pray.'

The chaplain, with a look of malice on his face, walked, or rather slunk, towards the door. 'You magnify my paltry sins,' he flung back. 'What of your own great ones?'

'Dare you, wretched man, to speak against your spiritual head!' thundered the bishop, starting to his feet, vested with the imperious authority of the Church. 'Go! Quit my sight, lest I cast you out from amongst us! Go!'

Before the blaze of that righteous wrath, Cargrim, livid and trembling, crept away like a beaten hound.

CHAPTER XXXIX

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

'BELL! Bell! do not give me up.'

'I must, Gabriel; it is my duty.'

'It is your cruelty! Ah, you never loved me as I love you.'

'That is truer than you think, my poor boy. I thought that I loved you, but I was wrong. It was your position which made me anxious to marry you; it was your weak nature which made me pity you. But I do not love you; I never did love you; and it is better that you should know the truth before we part.'

'Part? Oh, Bell! Bell!'

'Part,' repeated Bell, firmly, 'and for ever.'

Gabriel's head drooped on his breast, and he sighed as one, long past tears, who hears the clods falling on the coffin in which his beloved lies. He and Bell Mosk were seated in the little parlour at the back of the bar, and they were alone in the house, save for one upstairs, in the room of Mrs Mosk, who watched beside the dead. On hearing of her husband's rash act, the poor wife, miserable as she had been with the man, yet felt her earlier love for him so far revive as to declare that her heart was broken. She moaned and wept and refused all comfort, until one night she closed her eyes on the world which had been so harsh and bitter. So Bell was an orphan, bereft of father and mother, and crushed to the earth by sorrow and shame. In her own way she had loved her father, and his evil deed and evil end had struck her to the heart. She was even glad when her mother died, for she well knew that the sensitive woman would never have held up her head again, after the disgrace which had befallen her. And Bell, with a white face and dry eyes, long past weeping, sat in the dingy parlour, refusing the only comfort which the world could give her weary heart. Poor Bell! poor, pretty Bell!

'Think, Gabriel,' she continued, in a hard, tearless voice, 'think what shame I would bring upon you were I weak enough to consent to become your wife. I had not much to give you before; I have less than nothing now. I never pretended to be a lady; but I thought that, as your wife, I should never disgrace you. That's all past and done with now. I always knew you were a true gentleman—honourable and kind. No one but a gentleman like you would have kept his word with the daughter of a murderer. But you have done so, dear, and I thank and bless you for your kindness. The only way in which I can show how grateful I am is to give you back your ring. Take it, Gabriel, and God be good to you for your upright kindness.'

There was that in her tone which made Gabriel feel that her decision was irrevocable. He mechanically took the ring she returned to him and slipped it on his finger. Never again was it removed from where he placed it at that moment; and in after days it often reminded him of the one love of his life. With a second sigh, hopeless and resigned, he rose to his feet, and looked at the dark figure in the twilight of the room.

'What are your plans, Bell?' he asked in an unemotional voice, which he hardly recognised as his own.

'I am going away from Beormminster next week,' answered the girl, listlessly. 'Sir Harry has arranged all about this hotel, and has been most kind in every way. I have a little money, as Sir Harry paid me for the

furniture and the stock-in-trade. Of course I had to pay f—father's debts'—she could hardly speak the words—'so there is not much left. Still, I have sufficient to take me to London and keep me until I can get a situation.'

'As—as a barmaid?' asked Gabriel, in a low voice.

'As a barmaid,' she replied coldly. 'What else am I fit for?'

'Can I not help you?'

'No; you have given me all the help you could, by showing me how much you respect me.'

'I do more than respect you, Bell; I love you.'

'I am glad of that,' replied Bell, softly; 'it is a great thing for a miserable girl like me to be loved.'

'Bell! Bell! no one can cast a stone at you.'

'I am the daughter of a murderer, Gabriel; and I know better than you what the world's charity is. Do you think I would stay in this place, where cruel people would remind me daily and hourly of my father's sin? Ah, my dear, I know what would be said, and I don't wish to hear it. I shall bury my poor mother, and go away, never to return.'

'My poor Bell! God has indeed laid a heavy burden upon you.'

'Don't!' Her voice broke and the long-absent tears came into her eyes. 'Don't speak kindly to me, Gabriel; I can't bear kindness. I have made up my mind to bear the worst. Go away; your goodness only makes things the harder for me. After all, I am only a woman, and as a woman I must w-e-e-p.' She broke down, and her tears flowed quickly.

'I shall go,' said Gabriel, feeling helpless, for indeed he could do nothing. 'Good-bye, Bell!' he faltered.

'Good-bye!' she sobbed. 'God bless you!'

Gabriel, with a sick heart, moved slowly towards the door. Just as he reached it, Bell rose swiftly, and crossing the room, threw her arms round his neck, weeping as though her overcharged heart would break. 'I shall never kiss you again,' she wailed, 'never, never again!'

'God bless and keep you, my poor darling!' faltered Gabriel.

'And God bless you! for a good man you have been to me,' she sobbed, and then they parted, never to meet again in this world.

And that was the end of Gabriel Pendle's romance. At first he thought of going to the South Seas as a missionary, but his father's entreaties that he should avoid so extreme a course prevailed, and in the end he went no further from Beorminster than Heathcroft Vicarage. Mr Leigh died a few days after

Bell vanished from the little county town; and Gabriel was presented with the living by the bishop. He is a conscientious worker, an earnest priest, a popular vicar, but his heart is still sore for Bell, who so nobly gave him up to bear her own innocent disgrace alone. Where Bell is now he does not know; nobody in Beorminster knows—not even Mrs Pansey—for she has disappeared like a drop of water in the wild waste ocean of London town. And Gabriel works on amid the poor and needy with a cheerful face but a sore heart; for it is early days yet, and his heart-wounds are recent. No one save the bishop knows how he loved and lost poor Bell; but Mrs Pendle, with the double instinct of woman and mother, guesses that her favourite son has his own pitiful romance, and would fain know of it, that she might comfort him in his sorrow. But Gabriel has never told her; he will never tell her, but go silent and unmarried through life, true to the memory of the rough, commonplace woman who proved herself so noble and honourable in adversity. And so no more of these poor souls.

It is more pleasant to talk of the Whichello-Pansey war. '*Bella matronis detestata*,' saith the Latin poet, who knew little of the sex to make such a remark. To be sure, he was talking of public wars, and not of domestic or social battles; but he should have been more explicit. Women are born fighters—with their tongues; and an illustration of this truth was given in Beorminster when Miss Whichello threw down the gage to Mrs Pansey. The little old lady knew well enough that when George and Mab were married, the archdeacon's widow would use her famous memory to recall the scandals she had set afloat nearly thirty years before. Therefore, to defeat Mrs Pansey once and for all, she called on that good lady and dared her to say that there was any disgrace attached to Mab's parentage. Mrs Pansey, anticipating an easy victory, shook out her skirts, and was up in arms at once.

'I know for a fact that your sister Ann did not marry the man she eloped with,' cried Mrs Pansey, shaking her head viciously.

'Who told you this fact?' demanded Miss Whichello, indignantly.

'I—I can't remember at present, but that's no matter—it's true.'

'It is not true, and you know it is an invention of your own spiteful mind, Mrs Pansey. My sister was married on the day she left home, and I have her marriage certificate to prove it. I showed it to Bishop Pendle, because you poisoned his mind with your malicious lies, and he is quite satisfied.'

'Oh, any story would satisfy the bishop,' sneered Mrs Pansey; 'we all know what he is!'

'We do—an honourable Christian gentle-

man ; and we all know what you are—a scandalmongering, spiteful, soured cat.'

'Hoity-toity ! fine language this.'

'It is the kind of language you deserve, ma'am. All your life you have been making mischief with your vile tongue !'

'Woman,' roared Mrs Pansey, white with wrath, 'no one ever dared to speak like this to me.'

'It's a pity they didn't, then,' retorted the undaunted Miss Whichello ; 'it would have been the better for you, and for Beorminster also.'

'Would it indeed, ma'am ?' gasped her adversary, beginning to feel nervous ; 'oh, really !' with a hysterical titter, 'you and your certificate—I don't believe you have it.'

'Ask the bishop if I have not. He is satisfied, and that is all that is necessary, you wicked old woman.'

'You—you leave my house.'

'I shall do no such thing. Here I am, and here I'll stay until I speak my mind,' and Miss Whichello thumped the floor with her umbrella, while she gathered breath to continue.

'I haven't the certificate of my sister's marriage—haven't I ? I'll show it to you in a court of law, Mrs Pansey, when you are in the dock—the dock, ma'am !'

'Me in the dock ?' screeched Mrs Pansey, shaking all over, but more from fear than wrath. 'How—how—dare you ?'

'I dare anything to stop your wicked tongue. Everybody hates you ; some people are fools enough to fear you, but I don't,' cried Miss Whichello, erecting her crest ; 'no, not a bit. One word against me, or against Mab, and I'll have you up for defamation of character, as sure as my name's Selina Whichello.'

'I—I—I don't want to say a word,' mumbled Mrs Pansey, beginning to give way, after the manner of bullies when bravely faced.

'You had better not. I have the bishop and all Beorminster on my side, and you'll be turned out of the town if you don't mind your own business. Oh, I know what I'm talking about,' and Miss Whichello gave a crow of triumph, like a victorious bantam.

'I am not accustomed to this — this violence,' sniffed Mrs Pansey, producing her handkerchief ; 'if you—if you don't go, I'll call my servants.'

'Do, and I'll tell them what I think of you. I'm going now.' Miss Whichello rose briskly. 'I've had my say out, and you know what I intend to do if you meddle with my affairs. Good-day, Mrs Pansey, and good-bye, for it's a long time before I'll ever cross words with you again, ma'am,' and the little old lady marched out of the room with all the honours of war.

Mrs Pansey was completely crushed. She knew quite well that Miss Whichello was speaking the truth about the marriage, and that none of her own inventions could stand

against the production of the certificate. Moreover, she could not battle against the Bishop of Beorminster, or risk a realisation of Miss Whichello's threat to have her into court. On the whole, the archdeacon's widow concluded that it would be best for her to accept her defeat quietly and hold her tongue. This she did, and never afterwards spoke anything but good about young Mrs Pendle and her aunt. She even sent a wedding present, which was accepted by the victor as the spoils of war, and was so lenient in her speeches regarding the young couple that all Beorminster was amazed, and wished to know if Mrs Pansey was getting ready to join the late archdeacon. Hitherto the old lady had stormed and bullied her way through a meek and terrified world ; but now she had been met and conquered and utterly overthrown. Her nerve was gone, and with it went her influence. Never again did she exercise her venomous tongue. To use a vulgar but expressive phrase, Mrs Pansey was 'wiped out.'

Shortly before the marriage of George and Mab, the tribe of gipsies over which Mother Jael ruled vanished into the nowhere. Whither they went nobody knew, and nobody inquired, but their disappearance was a relief both to Miss Whichello and the bishop. The latter had decided that, to run no risks, it was necessary Mab should be married under her true name of Bosville ; and as Mother Jael knew that such was Jentham's real name, Miss Whichello fancied she might come to hear that Mab was called so, and make inquiries likely to lead to unpleasantness. But Mother Jael went away in a happy moment, so Miss Whichello explained to her niece and George that the name of the former was not 'Arden' but 'Bosville.' 'It is necessary that I should tell you this, dear, on account of the marriage,' said the little old lady ; 'your parents, my dearest Mab, are dead and gone ; but your father was alive when I took you to live with me, and I called you by another name so that he might not claim you. He was not a good man, my love.'

'Never mind, aunty,' cried Mab, embracing the old lady. 'I don't want to hear about him. You are both my father and my mother, and I know that what you say is right. I suppose,' she added, turning shyly to George, 'that Captain Pendle loves Miss Bosville as much as he did Miss Arden !'

'A rose by any other name, and all the rest of it,' replied George, smiling. 'What does it matter, my darling ? You will be Mab Pendle soon, so that will settle everything, even your meek husband.'

'George,' said Miss Bosville, solemnly, 'if there is one word in the English language which does *not* describe you, it is "meek".'

'Really ! and if there is one name in

the same tongue which fits you like a glove, it is—guess !

'Angel !' cried Mab, promptly.

George laughed. 'Near it,' said he, 'but not quite what I mean. The missing word will be told when we are on our honeymoon.'

In this way the matter was arranged, and Mab, as Miss Bosville, was married to Captain Pendle on the self-same day, at the self-same hour, that Lucy became Lady Brace. If some remarks were made on the name inscribed in the register of the cathedral, few people paid any attention to them, and those who did received from Miss Whichello the same skilful explanation as she had given the young couple. Moreover, as Mother Jael was not present to make inquiries, and as Mrs Pansey had not the courage to hint at scandal, the matter died a natural death. But when the honeymoon was waning, Mab reminded George of his promise to supply the missing word.

'Is it goose ?' she asked playfully.

'No, my sweetest, although it ought to be !' replied George, pinching his wife's pretty ear. 'It is Mab Pendle !' and he kissed her.

Brisk Dr Graham was at the double wedding, in his most amiable and least cynical mood. He congratulated the bishop and Mrs Pendle, shook hands warmly with the bridegrooms, and just as warmly—on the basis of a life-long friendship—kissed the brides. Also, after the wedding breakfast—at which he made the best speech—he had an argument with Baltic about his penal conception of Christianity. The ex-sailor had been very mournful after the suicide of Mark, as the rash act had proved how shallow had been the man's repentance.

'But what can you expect ?' said Graham to him. 'It is impossible to terrify people into a legitimate belief in religion.'

'I don't want to do that, sir,' replied Baltic, soberly. 'I wish to lead them to the Throne with love and tenderness.'

'I can hardly call your method by such names, my friend. You simply ruin people in this life to fit them, in their own despite, for their next existence.'

'When all is lost, doctor, men seek God.'

'Perhaps; but that's a shabby way of seeking Him. If I could not be converted of my own free will, I certainly shouldn't care about being driven to take such a course. Your system, my friend, is ingenious, but impossible.'

'I have yet to prove that it is impossible, doctor.'

'Humph ! I daresay you'll succeed in gaining disciples,' said Graham, with a shrug. 'There is no belief strange enough for some men to doubt. After Mormonism

and Joseph Smith's deification, I am prepared to believe that humanity will go to any length in its search after the unseen. No doubt you'll form a sect in time, Mr Baltic. If so, call your disciples Hobsonites.'

'Why, doctor Graham ?'

'Because the gist of your preaching, so far as I can understand, is a Hobson's choice,' retorted the doctor. 'When your flock of criminals lose everything through your exposure of their crimes, they have nothing left but religion.'

'Nothing left but God, you mean, sir; and God is everything.'

'No doubt. I agree with the latter part of your epigram, Baltic, although your God is not my God.'

'There is only one God, doctor.'

'True, my friend; but you and I see Him under different forms, and seek Him in different ways.'

'Our goal is the same !'

'Precisely; and that undeniable fact does away with the necessity of further argument. Good-bye, Mr Baltic. I am glad to have met you; original people always attract me,' and with a handshake and a kindly nod the little doctor hustled off.

So, in his turn, Baltic departed from Beaminster, and lost himself in the roaring tides of London. It is yet too early to measure the result of his work; to prognosticate if his peculiar views will meet with a reception likely to encourage their development into a distinct sect. But there can be no doubt that his truth and earnestness will, some day—and perhaps at no very distant date—meet with their reward. Every prophet convinced of the absolute truth of his mission succeeds in finding those to whom his particular view of the hereafter is acceptable beyond all others. So, after all, Baltic, the untutored sailor, may become the founder of a sect. What his particular 'ism' will be called it is impossible to say; but taking into consideration the man's extraordinary conception of Christianity as a punishing religion, the motto of his new faith should certainly be '*Cernit omnia Deus vindicta!*' And Baltic can find the remark cut and dried for his quotation in the last pages of the English dictionary.

So the story is told, the drama is played, and Bishop Pendle was well pleased that it should be so. He had no taste for excitement or for dramatic surprises, and was content that the moving incidents of the last few weeks should thus end. He had been tortured sufficiently in mind and body; he had, in Dr Graham's phrase, paid his forfeit to the gods in expiation of a too-happy fortune, therefore he might now hope to pass his remaining days in peace and quiet. George and Lucy were happily married; Gabriel was close at hand to be a staff upon which he could lean in his old age; and his beloved wife, the companion of so

many peaceful years, was still his wife, nearer and dearer than ever.

When the brides had departed with their several grooms, when the wedding guests had scattered to the four winds of heaven, Bishop Pendle took his wife's hand within his own, and led her into the library. Here he sat him down by her side, and opened the Book

of all books with reverential thankfulness of soul.

'I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon.'

'Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee : thou saidst, Fear not !'

And the words, to these so sorely-tried of late, were as the dew to the thirsty herb.

THE END.

The Crimson Cryptogram

By

Fergus Hume

Author of "The Mystery of a Hansom Cab," "The Silent House in Pimlico,"
"The Bishop's Secret," "A Traitor in London," "The Golden Wang-ho."



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The Crimson Cryptogram

CHAPTER I

A MIDNIGHT SURPRISE

"POVERTY, naked and unconcealed! One can endure that, with some patience, as a beaten soldier in the battle of life. But genteel pauperism—the semi-poverty of the middle-class, that lives a necessary lie at the cost of incessant worry and constant defeat—there you have the true misery of life. Believe me, Cass, there is no torture like that of an ambition which cannot be attained for lack of money."

"I did not know you were ambitious, Ellis."

"Not of setting the Thames on fire. My desires are limited to a good practice, a moderate income, a home, and a wife to love me. These wishes are reasonable enough, Heaven knows, yet some cursed Fate prevents their realisation. And I have to sit down and wait; a doctor can do nothing else. I must listen with such philosophy as I have for the ring of the door bell to announce my first patient, and the ring never comes. The heart grows sick, the brain rusty, the money goes, the temper sours, and so I pass the best days of my life."

"All things come to him who knows how to wait," said Cass, knocking the ashes out of a well-smoked briar.

"And the horse is the noblest of all animals," retorted Ellis. "I never *did* find consolation in proverbs of that class."

The two men sat in their dingy sitting-room talking as usual of a problematical future. Every night they discussed the subject, and every discussion ended without any definite conclusion being arrived at. Indeed, only Fortune could have terminated the arguments in a satisfactory manner, but as yet the fickle deity showed no disposition to make a third in the conversation. Therefore, Robert Ellis, M.D., and Harry Cass, journalist, talked, and talked, and talked. They also hoped for the best, a state of mind sufficiently eloquent of their penniless position. Unless they or their relatives are sick, rich people have no need to hope for the best. The second virtue dwells almost exclusively with the poor and ambitious, as do her two sisters.

Supper was just over, but even cold beef, pickles and bottled beer, with the after comfort of a pipe, could not make Ellis happy. The more philosophical Cass lay on the

ragged sofa and digested his meal, while the doctor walked up and down the room railing at Fate. He was a tall young man, clean-limbed, and sufficiently good-looking. Poverty and former opulence showed themselves in the threadbare velveteen smoking suit he wore ; and the past recurred to him as he flicked some ash off this relic of bygone days.

“O Lord !” he said regretfully, “how jolly life was when I bought these clothes some five years ago ! My father had not died a bankrupt country squire then ; and I was a rowdy medico, with plenty of money, and a weakness for the other sex.”

“You haven’t strengthened in that direction, Bob.”

“Perhaps not ; but I never think of women now—not even of a possible wife. Matrimony is a luxury a poor man must dispense with, if he wants to get on. I have dispensed with every blessed thing short of the bare necessities of existence, yet I don’t get any reward. Every dog has his day, they say : but the day of this poor cur never seems to dawn.”

“You are more bitter than usual, Ellis.”

“Because I am sick of my life. You have some compensation, Harry, in connection with that newspaper you write for. You mix with your fellow-men ; you exchange ideas ; you have your finger on the pulse of civilisation. But I sit in this dismal room, or walk about this Bœotian neighbourhood, in the vain hope of getting a start. I can’t rush out and drag in someone to be dosed ;

I can’t go from house to house soliciting patients. I can only wait, wait, wait, until I feel inclined to blow my brains out.”

“If you did that, Bob, the folly of the act would prove that you have none,” said Cass. “Come, old man, buck up ; something is sure to turn up when you least expect it.”

“Then nothing will turn up, for I am always in a state of expectation. I wish I hadn’t set up my tent at Dukesfield, Harry. It is the healthiest London suburb I know ; no one seems ill, and the graveyard is almost empty. I don’t believe people ever fall sick or die in this salubrious spot.”

Cass ran his fingers through a shock of bronze-coloured hair, and laughed at this professional view of the situation. “Haven’t you seen any likely patient ?” he asked, in his most sympathetic manner.

“Not one !” rejoined Ellis, sitting down and relighting his pipe. “Oh, yes, by the way, that young Moxton.”

“Who the deuce is he ?”

“A young ass I have met several times in the underground train, and with whom I have had some conversation at various times.”

“Why do you call him an ass ?”

“Because he is one,” growled the doctor ; “he is burning the candle at both ends, and killing himself with dissipation. Tallow face, bloodshot eyes, dry lips. Oh, Mr Moxton is making for the graveyard at racing speed !”

“Why don’t you warn him ?”

“It isn’t my business to meddle

with a stranger. I don't care if he lives or dies—unless he takes me as his medical attendant. Even then my interest in him would be purely professional. He is a detestable young cub."

"There is a want of pity about that speech, Bob!"

"Want of money, you mean. I have no pity for anyone save mine own poor self. Give me success, give me an income, and I'll overflow with the milk of human kindness. Poverty and disappointment is drying it all up. Hullo! Come in, Mrs Basket."

This invitation was induced, not by a rap at the door, but by the sound of stertorous breathing outside it. Mrs Basket's coming was audible long before she made her appearance; so Ellis, forewarned, usually saved her the trouble of knocking. She rolled heavily into the room, labouring like a Dutch lugger in a heavy sea. Indeed, she was built on similar lines, being squat and enormously stout—so bulky, indeed, that she could hardly push herself through the door. Like most fat women, Mrs Basket had a weakness for bright colours; and now presented herself in a vividly blue dress, a crimson shawl, and a green tulle cap decorated with buttercups of an aggressive yellow hue. Her unshapely figure, her large proportions and barbaric splendour, would have made the eyes and heart of an artist ache; but as Mrs Basket's lodgers knew little of art, they never troubled about her looks. Moreover, they liked and respected her as a kindly soul, for on several occasions, when

funds were low, she had pressed neither of them for rent. Mrs Basket was immensely proud of having a medical man under her roof; and always personally polished the brass plate with "Robert Ellis, M.D." inscribed on it. For Cass she had less respect, as being merely a "writing person"; but she tolerated him as the doctor's friend. Like the moon, he shone with a reflected and weaker glory.

"Lor', gentlemen, how them stairs do *try* me!" said the good lady, panting in the doorway and patting her ample breast; "they're that steep and that narrer, as to squeeze the breath out of me."

"You'll stick half-way up some day!" said Cass, chuckling, "then we shall have to send for a carpenter to saw you out!"

Mrs Basket laughed, in nowise offended, and announced that she had come to clear away supper, which she did with much clatter and hard breathing. Once or twice she glanced at the doctor's gloomy face, and blew a sigh with considerable noise. She knew of her lodger's bad fortune, and pitied him profoundly; but not daring to speak, she resumed her work with a mournful wag of the buttercup cap. Ignoring this by-play, which invited conversation, the young men resumed the subject of Moxton. Mrs Basket, dying to join in, at once espied an opportunity of doing so. The mere mention of the name was enough to set her off.

"Lor', gentlemen, you do turn me cold to my bones. Moxton! Why, the name makes me shiver,"

and Mrs Basket shivered duly to prove the truth of her words.

Usually the lodgers did not encourage their landlady to talk, as her tongue, once set wagging, was difficult to stop. But on this occasion her speech was so significant of mystery that Ellis wheeled round his chair to face her, and the reporter on the sofa, with true journalistic instinct, was at once on the alert for news. Mrs Basket, pleased with these tokens of interest, improved upon her speech.

"He has a wife!" said she, and closed her eyes with another shiver.

"Is that a remarkable circumstance?" asked Cass, drily.

"P'raps not, sir," replied Mrs Basket, with great dignity. "But what that pore young thing suffers the butcher and the baker do know."

"Does Moxton ill-treat her?"

"Eaven only knows what he do do, doctor. Nobody's ever seen her save the telegraph boy as called after dark, to be met with a carving-knife."

"A carving-knife! This is interesting. Who had the carving-knife, Mrs Basket?"

"Mrs Moxton, of course. She is young and pretty, I do assure you, gentlemen, yet she came on the child with a knife in her 'and, like Lady Macbeth in the play."

"What was that for?"

Mrs Basket wagged her head and the buttercups responded. "She told the boy as she thought he was robbers, and came out with the weeping to protect the silver. But it looks like loonatics to me."

"Do you mean to say she is mad?"

"Doctor, I says nothing, being above scandal. But this I do say, as she ought to be mad if she ain't. That Moxton"—Mrs Basket shivered like a jelly—"goes out night after night, leaving her shut up in that lonely 'ouse."

"Is the house lonely?"

"Mr Cass, I won't deceive you. It's that lonely as graveyards is company to it. Myrtle Viller they calls it, and it's the larst 'ouse of the row as is spreading out in the brickfield direction. The other vilers are unfinished, the contractor as was building them 'aving died with only Myrtle Viller ready to move into. His relatives is aquarrelling so over his money as they've let the vilers be for six months. Mr and Mrs Moxton took up 'ouse in the larst of 'em three months come next week, and they're the only pair as lives in that 'orrible lonely road."

As Mrs Basket drew breath after this long speech and lifted the tray, Ellis put a leading question: "Don't they keep a servant?"

"No, they don't, sir, not as much as a work'us orfan. She is all alone in the 'ouse night after night, as I tells you, and it ain't no wonder as she keeps the carving-knife 'andy."

"Where does Moxton go so regularly?"

"Ah, Mr Cass, where indeed? P'raps the perlice may know."

"Come now, Mrs Basket, you have no ground for making such a statement."

"Oh, 'aven't I?" cried Mrs Basket, indignantly.

"Why, he's well ofr and passes his days indoors doing nothing. 'Ow then does he earn his money? Why does he leave her alone? What's she doing with no servant and a carving-knife? No grounds!" Mrs Basket waddled towards the door, nose in air, and paused there to deliver a last word: "I shouldn't be surprised at 'earing of a tragedy between em. Oh, that dratted bell! And 'at half-past eleven, too! Decent folk should be a-bed."

The night-bell of Ellis's was ringing furiously, and Mrs Basket, putting down the tray, squeezed through the door as hurriedly as her unwieldy form permitted. As the tail of her blue skirt whisked out of sight, Cass jumped up from the sofa and smote the doctor's shoulder.

"Here is your first patient, Bob. Fortune is knocking at the door!"

"Ringing, you mean," said Ellis, joking, to hide his agitation.

As he spoke, the voice of Mrs Basket was heard in wordy expostulation, and a light-footed visitor flitted along the passage and into the room. The newcomer proved to be a woman, young and pretty, bareheaded, and apparently wild with terror. Her entrance and appearance were dramatic.

"The doctor!" she gasped, leaning against the door-post to support her trembling limbs.

"I am a doctor," said Ellis, advancing. "What is it?"

"My husband—my husband is—dead!" She paused with a

catching in the throat, then her voice leaped to alto: "Murdered!"

"Murdered!" exclaimed both men, with a simultaneous movement forward.

"Murdered, in the garden! Doctor, come! come!"

"Who is your husband?" stammered Ellis, his wits not quite under control. "What is his name?"

"Moxton! Moxton!" she answered impatiently.

"Come, doctor, don't lose time! I am Mrs Moxton. My husband has been murdered!"

CHAPTER II

THE WRITING IN BLOOD

THE long arm of coincidence was startlingly apparent in this instance. Both men were so amazed at the terrible news fitting in so neatly, not only with the subject of conversation, but with Mrs Basket's prophetic remark when the bell rang, that they looked at one another dumbfounded. Mrs Moxton stared at their motionless figures with indignant eyes.

"Are you not coming?" she demanded vehemently, seizing the hand of Ellis. "Don't I tell you my husband is dead!"

"I am coming, Mrs Moxton," said Ellis, hurriedly. "But if he is dead my presence will be useless. This is a case for the police."

If Mrs Moxton was pale before she became even paler at this last remark, and, shrinking back, spread out her hands with a ter-

rified gesture. "No, no, not the police! Why the police?"

"You say your husband has been murdered," cried Cass, with sudden suspicion; "therefore the police must be called in at once. Who murdered the man?"

"I don't know," murmured Mrs Moxton. Then his imperious, suspicious tone seemed to stir her indignation. She threw back her head haughtily. "I don't know," she repeated deliberately. "My husband went out this evening. I sat up for him as he promised to return about midnight. Shortly after eleven"—here she glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece—"I heard a cry, and thinking something was wrong I ran to the door. There was someone moaning on the garden path. I went to see who it was, and found my husband bleeding to death from a wound in the back. He died a minute afterwards, and I came for you."

"How did you recognise your husband in the dark?"

"I—I had a candle," she replied, in a low voice and with hesitation.

"It's blowing awful," wheezed Mrs Basket at the door, and the other woman turned towards her abruptly. The landlady's full moon of a face had suspicion written in every wrinkle. "Had you the carving-knife?" she asked.

"The carving-knife?"

"Yes, the same as you frightened the telegraph boy with?"

"I had no carving-knife," returned Mrs Moxton, haughtily. "What do you mean by these questions?" She turned again to the men and burst into furious

speech. "Have I come to a lunatic asylum?" she cried. "You talk, this woman talks, and I want help. Doctor, come! Come at once! And you, sir, go for the police if it is necessary."

Ellis hastily threw on a cap, snatched up some needful things for a wounded man, and followed Mrs Moxton out of the house. Mrs Basket and Harry were left face to face with the same thought in their minds.

"What did I say about her 'aving the carving-knife, sir?"

"Yes, by Jove! And her talk-ing of exploring with a lighted candle in this wind!"

"She's afraid of the police, too, Mr Cass," said Mrs Basket, in tragic tones. "She's done for him, sir."

"Well—she—might—— No," cried Harry, rumpling his hair. "If she was guilty she would not come for Ellis."

Mrs Basket snorted in a disbelieving manner. "Oh, wouldn't she, sir? You don't know the hussies women are. That Mrs Moxton's a deep 'un as ever was."

"Here," cried Cass, rummaging about for his cap, "I'm losing time. I must go for the police at once."

"Come back and tell me if they takes her," shouted Mrs Basket after him with morbid glee. "I believe she's done it with the carving-knife."

But Cass did not hear her, as the wind was high and he was already some distance away. As he sped along the silent streets storm-clouds were racing across the face of a watery moon, and a

drizzle of rain moistened his face. Being a reporter, Cass was friendly with constables, and knew the station at Dukesfield well, having often gone there to glean paragraphs. This time he went to give more terrible and sensational news than he had ever received, and stumbled almost into Inspector Drake's arms in his haste.

"Steady there," said Drake, gruffly; then recognising the agitated face of Cass in the flaring gaslight, he added, in a tone of surprise: "You, sir; whatever's come over you at this time of night?"

"Drake, there has been a murder at Myrtle Villa down the Jubilee Road, leading to the brickfields. A man called Moxton has been stabbed. His wife came for Dr Ellis, and I ran on to tell you!"

The inspector heard this startling intelligence with a phlegm begotten by twenty years' experience of similar reports. "Who done it, Mr Cass? Does the wife know?"

"No; she says she heard a cry, and ran out to find her husband dying on the garden path. He died in her arms."

"Did she see anyone about?"

"I don't know. I never asked her. That is your business, Drake. Come along, Ellis is with her and the dead man."

"Oh, he is dead, then?" remarked the inspector, leisurely putting on his cap and cloak.

"So Mrs Moxton says. Come!"

Leaving the station in charge of an underling, Drake called a policeman, and followed Cass into

the windy night. The two, with the constable tailing after them, marched military fashion along several deserted and lampless streets, until they turned into the Jubilee Road, a dark thoroughfare of empty, roofless houses and incomplete pavements. Civilisation had not yet established order in this region, and the street in embryo ended suddenly on the verge of naked lands. Beyond twinkled the red and green signal lights of the railway, and between, piles of bricks were heaped in Babylon-like mounds. Myrtle Villa was the last house on the right abutting on this untrimmed plain; and the three men were guided to it by a winking light in the garden. It was that of a lantern held by Mrs Moxton, and shed yellow rays on the face of the dead man. Ellis, kneeling beside the corpse, completed a startling and dramatic picture.

"Oh!" cried the woman, with something like dismay, as the light revealed uniforms, "the police!"

"Yes, ma'am," said Drake, glancing sharply at her white cheeks, "we have come to see about this matter. Is the gentleman dead, doctor?"

"I should think so. Look here!" Ellis rolled over the body and showed a wound under the left shoulder-blade, round which the blood had coagulated. "The poor devil must have died within ten minutes after the blow was struck."

"He died in my arms," moaned Mrs Moxton. "Oh, Edgar!"

"Did he tell you who stabbed him, ma'am?"

"No; he never spoke a word."

The inspector took the lantern from her shaking hand, and swung it round between corpse and gate. The path was of beaten gravel, and no footmarks were visible; but here and there a stain of blood soaked into the ground, and from this Drake drew his conclusions.

"He was stabbed from behind while opening the gate," he said judicially, "and fell forward into the garden. Look at this stain, and this; the poor gentleman had strength enough to crawl these few yards. Wanted to reach the door, no doubt. What brought you out, ma'am?"

"His cry! I was waiting up for him in the back bedroom, and I heard a shriek. At first I was afraid, as this place is very lonely. Then I came to the door with a candle, and ran down the path. Edgar was moaning dreadfully, and died almost immediately afterwards."

"The wind is high, ma'am?"

Mrs Moxton understood his inference directly.

"It blew out the candle," she explained; "but I ran from the door, shading it with my hand, and as there was a lull for a moment, I had just time to catch a glimpse of his face and recognise my husband."

"About what time was this, ma'am?"

"Some time after eleven. I can't say when. I did not look at my watch."

"It was exactly half-past eleven

when you entered my house," said Ellis.

"Then Edgar was murdered between eleven and half-past. I wound up my watch for the night at eleven, and at that time I had not heard the cry. I ran all the way to your house."

"That would take five minutes, more or less," said Cass.

"And the man must have lived some minutes after the blow, to crawl this distance," observed the inspector, measuring the space with his eye. "Did you come out at once, ma'am?"

"No!" replied Mrs Moxton, with some hesitation. "I was afraid. I heard the cry and waited for a time, thinking I was mistaken. It was about ten minutes, more or less, before I summoned up courage to open the front door."

"On the whole," said Ellis, "it would seem that the murder was committed at a quarter past eleven. Well, Mr Drake, what is to be done?"

"Nothing can be done until the morning," replied Drake. "The man who did this is no doubt far enough away by this time."

"A man!" cried Mrs Moxton. "Do you think a man did it?"

The inspector was on the alert immediately. "Have you any reason to think that a woman killed him?" he asked sharply.

"I! No. I cannot guess who committed the murder." Mrs Moxton seemed anxious, nervous, and sorry she had said so much. "Shall we take the body into the house, sir?" she asked in a low tone.

"It will be as well, ma'am, and I shall leave this constable to look after it for the night."

"Thank you, thank you," said the widow, shuddering. "I should be afraid to stay by myself."

"Let me stay also!" said Ellis, moved by her beauty and distress.

"Oh, do, do. Would you mind?"

"I'll stay," replied the doctor, briefly, and assisted the others to lift the body. They carried it up the path, Mrs Moxton lighting them onward with the lantern. It was a strange and gruesome procession pacing through the black and stormy night; and to imaginative Cass the house and garden, commonplace as they were, reeked of the shambles.

When the body was laid on the bed, Drake gave some directions to his subordinate, and departed with Cass. Ellis and the policeman remained behind, and the doctor's first care was to give Mrs Moxton a bromide tabloid.

"You are worn out with anxiety and nerves," he said. "I saw that at my house, and so brought these tabloids with me. Lie down and sleep."

"Shall I ever sleep again?" sighed Mrs Moxton. However, she obediently did as she was told, and then the men turned their attention to the corpse.

It was that of a lean young man with scanty light hair, and a thin, fair moustache. The lines of dissipation, the marks of premature ageing from debauchery, had been smoothed out by death, and the white face was as unwrinkled and placid as a waxen

mask. The body was clothed in evening dress, with a light-coloured overcoat, and the constable pointed out to Ellis that the watch, chain, studs and links—all costly—were untouched.

"Robbers didn't bring about this murder," said the policeman.

They undressed the body slowly. As Ellis drew off the shirt, the cuffs of which were dappled with blood, he noticed strange marks on the left arm. From wrist to elbow, on the inner part of the arm, various signs appeared on the white skin. These were rudely streaked with blood, and Ellis afterwards copied them into his note-book, thinking they might be useful later on, as indeed they proved to be.

"What do these signs mean?" he asked the policeman.

"I dunno, sir; but he did 'em hisself. See, doctor," and he lifted the right hand of the corpse. Ellis looked eagerly and saw that the forefinger of the hand was black with dried blood.

CHAPTER III

AN OPEN VERDICT

NEXT day the body of the unfortunate man was removed to the Dukesfield morgue, and twenty-four hours later the coroner held an inquiry in the coffee-room of the Lancaster Hotel. Public interest was greatly roused over the matter, and the ubiquitous reporters of the great "dailies"—amongst them Harry Cass—attended, note-book in hand, to

supply their readers with sensational details. A rumour—first set afloat by the babbling tongue of Mrs Basket—was prevalent that Mrs Moxton had killed her husband with a carving-knife. It was known from the same source that she had lived a lonely life since taking up her abode in Myrtle Villa, that Moxton had neglected her shamefully, that he had left her nightly by herself, and had even denied her the comfort and company of a servant. Hence it was openly declared that cruel treatment and contemptuous desertion had driven Mrs Moxton to commit the crime. But this theory found no favour in the sight of Dr Ellis, and he avowed himself the champion of the pretty widow.

"If she were guilty she would not have announced the crime as she did," he argued with Cass. "It would have been easy for her to let the corpse lie on the path all night, and pretend ignorance when it was discovered by the milkman. Also, if she struck the blow she had a whole night at her disposal to vanish into the unknown."

"Flight would have proved her guilt, Bob. Besides, she would have been tracked down on that tacit confession of her crime."

"I don't agree with you. Nothing is known of the Moxtons, as they kept very much to themselves. Hardly anyone saw her or knew her by sight. She could have disappeared like a drop of water into the ocean of London, without leaving a trace for the most cunning detective to follow.

Instead of doing this—her wisest plan if she killed her husband—she stays and faces the matter out in all innocence."

Cass produced a newspaper from his pocket. "I can suggest a theory for her remaining. Here"—he pointed to a paragraph in the death column—"three days ago, Edgar Allan Moxton, the great picture-dealer of Bond Street, died, leaving a large fortune behind him. Now this dead man, as I judge from the similarity of Christian and surname, is probably the son of Moxton. If so, he, had he lived, would, no doubt, inherit the money. As he is dead, Mrs Moxton, the widow, may do so. A fortune is worth running some risk for, Bob."

But the faith of Ellis was not to be shaken.

"The similarity of names may be a mere coincidence, such as occurs more frequently in real life than in fiction. Also, even if you can prove the relationship, it does not show that Mrs Moxton is waiting for the fortune, or that she is even aware of the death. Give her the benefit of the doubt, Harry."

"I give her much more than the jury will do, Ellis. Public opinion is against her."

"Bah! what do the tinker and tailor and candlestick maker know of the matter?"

"They may not know much now, but they will soon be primed with sufficient evidence to give a verdict. The jury is chosen from the class you mention so contemptuously."

Dr Ellis knew this very well, and knew, moreover, that rumour spoke ill of the widow. Therefore, it was with some doubt whether she would have a fair hearing that he attended the inquest. By the time he arrived the hotel was so crowded that the people overflowed into the road. The young man pushed his way into the public room and found that the proceedings had already commenced. He glanced round for Mrs Moxton, and saw her seated near the coroner, clothed in black, closely veiled, and listening attentively to Drake's evidence.

The inspector's testimony was brief and meagre, for the police had, as yet, discovered nothing. He described the finding of the body, the futile search for the weapon with which the murder had been committed, and the failure of his attempt to learn where the deceased had so regularly spent his nights. Nevertheless, the identity of the dead man had been established, for he was the son of a Bond Street picture-dealer, Edgar Allan Moxton. Strange to say, father and son had died within a few hours of one another, the former in the morning from natural causes, the latter shortly before midnight by violence. Finally, Drake stated that hitherto the police had found no clue likely to lead to the identification and capture of the murderer.

"Which shows that the police don't suspect Mrs Moxton," murmured Ellis to Cass.

The doctor himself was the next

witness, and deposed as to his summons by Mrs Moxton, and his examination of the corpse. Deceased had died from the stab of a broad-bladed knife which had pierced the left lung. The blow must have been struck by a strong arm, he averred, since the blade had penetrated through an overcoat, inside coat, waistcoat and shirt.

"Could a woman have struck such a blow?" asked one of the jury.

"An exceptionally strong woman might have done so," responded Ellis.

All eyes were turned on the trim, slight figure of Mrs Moxton, and there was a general feeling that the doctor's answer exonerated her from having personally committed the murder. She was of too frail and delicate a physique to have struck home the knife with so sure and deadly an aim. Yet she might have put the weapon into another's hand, for it seemed incredible that she should be ignorant of the tragedy which took place within a few yards of her. When Mrs Moxton's name was called out, and she stood up to give evidence, those present drew a long breath and waited eagerly for her to speak. Hitherto public curiosity had been languid; now the appearance of the principal witness stimulated it to fever heat. From the dead man's widow, if from anyone, the truth of this strange tragedy should come.

Mrs Moxton threw back her veil when she took the oath, and revealed a pretty face, somewhat

marred by sleeplessness and weeping. She was colourless, red-eyed, and low-voiced, but gathering courage, as she proceeded, told her tale with great simplicity and apparent truth. The evidence she gave may be condensed as follows:—

"My name is Laura Moxton. I married my husband, Edgar, twelve months ago. He was the son of Mr Moxton, of Bond Street, and the heir to great wealth. When he met me I was earning my living by type-writing, and although I refused twice to marry him he insisted that I should do so. At last I yielded and became his wife, whereupon his father cut him off with a shilling. Edgar had some money inherited from his mother, and with this we went to Monte Carlo, where he tried to increase his fortune by gambling. However, he was unlucky, and we returned to London in eight months poorer than when we left. For the sake of economy my husband took Myrtle Villa, as he obtained it at a low rental on account of the unfinished state of the road. For the same reason we dispensed with a servant and hired the furniture. I did all the housework, and for want of money rarely went outside the house. My husband was unkind and neglectful, and accused me of being the cause of the quarrel with his father which had cost him his inheritance. It is now three months since we took Myrtle Villa. My husband, for the first week, remained indoors at night; afterwards he went out regularly. I did not know what he did with

himself, or where he went, as he always refused to tell me, and his temper became so morose that I was afraid to insist upon his confidence. He always dressed himself carefully in evening dress, and usually wore a light overcoat. As a rule, he returned shortly after midnight. Sometimes I waited up for him, at other times I went to bed. I was often afraid during the long evenings in the house, as it was so lonely and so near the waste lands where the brickworks stand. On the night of the murder my husband went out as usual. It was August 16th. I waited for his return and shut myself up in the bedroom at the back of the house. About eleven I grew tired of waiting and prepared to go to bed. I know it was eleven as I wound up my watch at that hour. I was brushing my hair when I thought I heard a cry, but as the wind was blowing strongly I fancied I was mistaken. Still, the belief was so strong that, after doing up my hair, I took the candle and went to the door. The light showed me someone lying on the path, half-way to the gate. I also heard a moan. At once I ran down, shading the candle light in the hollow of my hand. For the moment there was a lull in the wind, and the light burnt long enough to show me that my husband was lying wounded on the path. Then the wind extinguished the light. I took my husband in my arms. He moaned feebly, but could not speak. Then he gave a gasp and died. I was dreadfully afraid, and without

waiting to get my hat or cloak, I ran for Dr Ellis. I saw no one; I heard no one; and I do not know who killed my husband."

"In what position was he lying when you came upon him?"

"On his back. As the light of my candle fell for a moment on his face, I recognised him at once."

"How did you know he was wounded, seeing that the wound was in his back?"

"I saw blood on his shirt-front and coat. Also, his face was so white and he moaned so much that I guessed he was hurt. When I took him in my arms I felt on my fingers the blood flowing from his back."

"Had your husband enemies?"

"I do not know. He introduced me to no one he knew. I lived a lonely life. All the time I was at Myrtle Villa I saw no one but my husband."

"Did you know any of his friends abroad?"

"No. He introduced me to no one."

"Did he ever speak of anyone as having a grudge against him?"

"No. He spoke of himself and his father, but of no one else."

"Did he know that his father was dead when he left the house on August 16th?"

"Not to my knowledge. He said nothing to me. Until I heard Mr Drake's evidence I did not know myself that Mr Moxton, senior, was dead."

"Did your husband receive any letter on the day of his death?"

"No. He never received letters, nor did he take in a newspaper. We lived quite isolated from the

world. I did not like my position, but I feared to complain, on account of my husband's temper."

"Was your husband's temper such as would provoke enmity?"

"I think so: he had a very bad temper."

"Did he drink much?"

"Yes, he drank a great deal of brandy, and was very morose when intoxicated. When I saw him like that, I used to shut myself in the back bedroom."

"Did your husband treat you cruelly?"

"He neglected me and spoke harshly to me, but he never struck me."

"What were your feelings towards him?"

"I loved him when we married, for then he was kind and good. Afterwards I had no feeling towards him save one of terror."

"On one occasion it is reported that you came to meet a telegraph boy with a carving-knife. Is that true?"

"Perfectly true. But I did not know who was at the door. It was growing dark, and the house was very lonely. I took the knife in case it might be a tramp."

"Did you usually carry the knife to protect yourself?"

"Oh, no! On that occasion I was in the kitchen, and snatched it from the table when the knock came to the door."

"You never went to the door with it on any other occasion?"

"Certainly not. No one else ever came after dark. The tradespeople called always in the day-time. Then I was not afraid."

"For whom was the telegram?"

"For my husband. I did not open it, but left it on the table in the dining-room. He got it when he came home that night."

"Did he tell you what it was about?"

"No. He never mentioned the subject."

"Do you know anything about the marks in blood on the arm?"

"No. I was shown them by Doctor Ellis, but I do not know what they mean, or, indeed, what they are."

"Do they not look to you like secret writing? Like a cryptogram?"

"I don't know anything about secret writing. They look like blood smears to me. I do not understand them."

"Have you any idea why deceased wrote them on his arm?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Did you ever see your husband use a cypher of that kind?"

"Never. I never saw him use a cypher of any sort."

"Did you ever notice marks like them before?"

"No. I know nothing about them."

"Can you throw any light at all on this murder?"

"None whatever. I was amazed to find my husband dying."

"He said no word—no name?"

"He did nothing but moan, and died in a few moments."

This examination, which lasted some considerable time, concluded all available evidence for the time being. On the meagre intelligence to be gleaned from it the jury framed their verdict, and stated that the deceased, Edgar

Moxton, had been murdered by some person or persons unknown.

CHAPTER IV

THE READING OF THE BLOOD SIGNS

IN these progressive times, the duration of proverbial wonderment has been reduced from nine days to nine hours. The Dukesfield murder case was mysterious and dramatic, yet, even with these elements of popularity, it became stale and out of date within the week. The attention of the masses and the classes was more or less concentrated on the visit of an Eastern potentate, whose amazing jewels, and still more amazing barbarisms, appealed to the popular humour. Moxton's death and the strange circumstances attendant thereon ceased to be commented upon by the newspapers; they faded out of the public mind, and continued to be talked about only in the neighbourhood wherein the tragedy occurred. Yet even in Dukesfield, after a fortnight of discussion, the interest grew languid.

It was just as well for Mrs Moxton that circumstances stood thus, for, in defiance of public opinion, she still continued to inhabit Myrtle Villa. Her husband's maltreated body was quietly buried in the Dukesfield cemetery, so quietly, indeed, that, save the necessary undertaker and his men, not a single person followed the unfortunate victim to his untimely grave. It is only justice to say that

Mrs Moxton would have done so but for the earnest advice of Ellis. Knowing her unpopularity and its cause, he warned her against thrusting herself forward. Like a wise woman, the widow took the hint, but passionately resented the reason for which it was given. When the ceremony was at an end, Ellis came to tell her about it, and she defended herself to him after the fashion of women, with many words and much indignation. As soon as he could obtain a hearing, the doctor assured her that in his case such arguments were needless.

"I am a firm believer in your innocence, Mrs Moxton," he declared, in all earnestness, "and you must not trouble about the idle gossip of the neighbourhood. People will talk, and it is just a chance that they did not call you a martyr instead of a criminal."

"It is shameful that a friendless woman should be so abused!"

"You are not altogether friendless, Mrs Moxton. If you will accept me as your champion, I shall be proud to occupy the position."

The widow looked steadfastly at Ellis, and something—perceptible to a woman only—which she saw in his eyes caused her to lower her own. She replied indirectly, with true feminine evasion,—

"I shall always be glad to have you for a friend, doctor. You have been—you are—very good to me."

But after this speech Mrs Moxton became reserved and hesitating, finally silent; so that

Ellis, aware that his eyes had revealed too much, took his leave in a few minutes. By this time he was conscious that he had fallen in love with the pretty widow, and marvelled that he should lose his heart after three weeks' acquaintance. In the opinion of some, love at first sight is a fallacy, and at one time Ellis had been of these wiseacres. Now his personal experience proved the truth of the saying. Mrs Moxton was not a supremely beautiful woman, but she had a young and comely face, and an extraordinarily fascinating manner. It was to this last that Ellis succumbed, and he made scarcely any effort to resist its influence. Yet Mrs Moxton was a woman with a humble—if not a doubtful—past, and there was a slur on her reputation as the widow of a murdered man. Ellis could not help admitting to himself that she was no wife for a struggling doctor, yet, in spite of such admission, he was bent upon marrying her, should the opportunity offer itself. In the meantime he kept his own counsel and told no one—not even Cass—of this new element in his life.

That same evening Ellis and his friend sat down after supper to discuss again their domestic affairs and the state of the exchequer. The outlook was now considerably improved, for Cass had returned with a good piece of news, which he lost no time in imparting to the doctor.

"The gods of things-as-they-ought-to-be have awakened to the injustice of my terrestrial treatment, Bob," he announced

gleefully. "I have been made theatrical critic for the *Early Bird*, and a story of mine has been accepted by the *Piccadilly Magazine*."

"Good news, old boy; I congratulate you. What is the reason for this sudden discovery of your merits?"

"Moxton's murder, I think. My editor was pleased with the blood-and-thunder report I gave of it."

"Hence he sets you to criticise the drama," said Ellis, drily.

"I suppose so. Perhaps he thinks that if I can describe the murder of a human being I can deal with the slaughter of drama and comedy by incompetent actors."

"The profession would be flattered by your preconceived ideas of their capabilities, Harry."

"Nonsense! I am thinking of extreme cases only. But now that I have a better salary I can help you, Bob. I shall be like the Auvergnat carrier in Balzac's story, and aid a great physician to reach his rightful position for the benefit of humanity."

"Thank you, Harry, but I fear I am not sufficiently gifted to deserve your self-denial. Besides, I have been discovered also."

"What? You have a patient?"

"Yes, a morbid lady with nerves. She saw my name in connection with the discovery of that poor devil's body, and came to see me about her own trouble."

"Nerves and murder. I don't see the connection."

"She did, however," said Ellis, with a shrug, "and asked me to

save her life. It is in no danger, as you may guess. She is nothing but an excitable female with too much money and no employment. I wrote her a prescription, humoured her hypochondria, and so pleased her that she departed, pronouncing me to be a charming young man who thoroughly understood her 'system.' She intends to send all her friends to me."

"That's capital," cried Cass, shaking hands with his friend. "Once you get the start you will soon roll on to fame and fortune. I'll meet you on Tom Tiddler's ground, Bob, and we'll pick up the gold and silver in company. Dr Robert Ellis, of Harley Street, specialist in eye diseases, and Henry Cass, the great, the only novelist! But I say, Bob," added the journalist, "don't degenerate into a humbug, old man."

"My dear fellow, in dealing with women, one must be a humbug more or less. They like it."

"That is true in every case. Women always prefer the graceful humbugs of this world to the genuine, honest creatures. That is why I have not been snapped up by a rich heiress."

Ellis laughed absently, being more taken up with his own thoughts than with the humour of his friend. "Yes, I believe this patient will send me others, and that, sooner or later, I shall scrape together a practice in Dukessfield. In years to come I may even be able to set up as an eye specialist."

"In Harley Street, Bob, in Harley Street."

"In any street so long as I can

make a good income. When I become known as an authority on diseases of the eye——”

“You are known, Bob,” interrupted Cass, vigorously. “That book on the eye you wrote is well known.”

“Stuff! My book fell still-born from the press. Besides, if it is known, only my medical brethren have the knowledge. I wish to be popular with the masses, Harry, to have a name with them, for it is the public who pay.”

“Well, well, that will come. I believe in your future, Bob. You will have all you wish for—an income, a name, and a wife.”

“A wife!” Ellis turned restlessly in the comfortable old arm-chair, and laughed in a somewhat embarrassed fashion. “A wife?” he repeated doubtfully.

“Of course; you don’t intend to remain single all your days, do you? You must marry, Bob, for a doctor without a wife, a tactful wife, mind you, is like a coach without wheels. I hope, however,” and here Harry’s tone became serious, “that you will not marry a widow.”

“A widow! I don’t quite understand.”

“Or,” continued Cass, inattentive to the interpolation, “or the wife of a man who has met with a violent death.”

“Harry, what makes you think that Mrs. Moxton——” So far Ellis proceeded violently, then stopped with the conviction that he had betrayed his secret.

“The cap fits, I see,” remarked Cass, pointedly, and shut up in his turn.

For the next few minutes there was an embarrassed silence, neither man being willing to speak, lest a word should act like a spark in a powder magazine. Ellis threw down his pipe, and, as was his fashion when annoyed, took to rapid walking in the limited space of the sitting-room. Cass eased his position on the sofa and waited developments.

“Yes, it is true,” said the doctor in a loud voice, so as to drown opposition. “I am in love with Mrs Moxton. Now, what do you say?”

“Only this. It is hard enough for you to make a career without seeking for a clog which will prevent you rising in your profession.”

“How do you know Mrs Moxton would prove such a clog?”

“I don’t know; I surmise only. I am ignorant of the lady’s personality, save from what I have learnt in chance moments. You are in the like position.”

“I know her better than you do.”

“Possibly. But do you know her well enough to risk making her your wife?”

“I didn’t say that I intended to ask her to marry me.”

Cass laughed. “That is a quibble. With honourable men a declared passion is always the prelude to marriage.”

“But I have not declared my passion,” argued Ellis, in vexed tones.

“Not yet, maybe, but you will do so when the times comes.”

“After all, Harry, she is a charming woman.”

“Charming and pretty, no doubt. But is she the wife for you?”

Before you can answer that question, you must know her past and whitewash her present."

Dr Ellis sat down aghast. "Good heavens, Cass! Surely you don't think her guilty?"

"I don't know enough about the case to say," said Cass, meditatively; "but Mrs Moxton puzzles me, I confess. For instance, she tells lies."

"Tells lies!" repeated the widow's champion with great indignation.

"Yes, and in the most unblushing manner. At the inquest she said that she took her husband's body in her arms and felt the blood flowing from the wound in his back. Now, it is my impression that she never touched the body."

"How can you prove that?"

"Very simply. When she came into this room she wore a plain black dress, with cuffs of white linen. Now, if she had handled the body and had touched the wound, it is only natural to suppose that those cuffs would be stained with blood. I noticed, however, that they were not."

"But that is all the stronger proof that she is innocent."

"Of the actual murder, maybe, Bob; but it does not prove that she is ignorant of who killed the man. She told lies about the handling of the body, as I said. It seems to me," added Cass, reflectively, "that Mrs Moxton is shielding the assassin."

"But why should she shield a murderer?"

"Ah, that you must learn from the woman herself. But if she is completely in the dark about the

matter, why does she tell falsehoods? Then that cypher, those blood signs on the arms—the dying man wrote them to indicate to his wife the name of the murderer."

"You can't prove that!" cried Ellis, much excited.

"Only by deduction. Why should the man write in a cypher if his wife did not know the cypher?"

"The information, whatever it is, might have been intended for someone else."

"I don't think so. Moxton knew that his wife would be the first to discover his dead body, and wrote the message in cypher for her information. It is only reasonable to think so."

"Mrs Moxton says she does not know what the cypher means."

"Precisely. She is telling lies and shielding the true criminal."

"How do you know that the cypher contains the name of the criminal, Harry?"

"Because I can read the cypher," was Cass's unexpected reply. "I found out the key yesterday. Look here, Bob." He jumped up from the sofa and, crossing to the writing-table, hastily scrawled two diagrams. "You see," he added, "here is a criss-cross, and a St Andrew's cross with two letters in each angle which exhausts the alphabet."

Ellis looked at the diagrams with amazement and shook his head. "I am as much in the dark as ever. Explain."

"Well, you use the angles and the central criss-cross square for letters, with an added dot for the

second letter. If you wish to write your name, 'Ellis,' in signs, you take the first letter of the third angle in the criss-cross, the two second letters of the sixth angle; the first letter of the square, and the first letter first angle St Andrew's cross."

"I see, and 'L' being the second letter of the sixth angle you put a dot."

"Of course. If I wrote 'K' I should put no dot," replied Harry, and took a morsel of paper out of his pocket. "Here," said he, "is a copy of the sign on the dead man's arm. The second letter of ninth angle criss-cross: the first letter second angle St Andrew's cross, and the second letter fourth angle of the same. Do you see? Now take this pencil, Bob, and use the key to turn them into letters."

Ellis did so, and produced three letters on the paper given to him. "'R U Z,'" he read slowly. "What does that mean? Is it a word?"

"I don't think so. There is no word spelt 'Ruz' in any language that I am acquainted with. I believe those three letters are the initials of the man who killed Moxton. For some reason the dying man did not desire to give up his murderer to justice, but at the same time he wished to let his wife know who struck the blow, hence the cypher. Mrs Moxton can read the meaning, depend upon it, Bob."

"It seems strange," assented Ellis, surveying the letters thoughtfully. "Do you think there are three names here, or only two?"

"I can't say. 'R U' may mean Rupert or Rudolph, but I am in the dark so far. I have discovered the letters, Bob; it is for Mrs Moxton to explain them to you."

"What about this other sign?" said the doctor, evading a reply.

"Well, at first I thought it was a serpent, but as it has four feet and a wriggle of a tail, I conclude it is a lizard. Mere guessing, you understand."

"What connection can it have with the letters?"

"I don't know. Ask me something easier, or rather," said Cass, with a peculiar smile, "ask Mrs Moxton. She knows the truth about letters, and lizard and murder. But she won't tell it to you."

"Why not?" asked Ellis, angrily.

"Because, my poor fellow, I firmly believe that the murderer of Mr Moxton is the lover of Mrs Moxton."

CHAPTER V

MRS MOXTON SEEKS COUNSEL

NEEDLESS to say, Ellis, in his then state of mind, declined to believe that the widow had intrigued with a lover, or had—according to the theory of Cass—armed his hand with the knife. In her evidence she declared that she knew no one in Dukesfield and went nowhere, and this statement was substantiated by Mrs Basket. The landlady, with feminine curiosity about matters which did not concern her, was as good as a detective, and from the first

coming of the mysterious Moxtons to Myrtle Villa, she had watched their movements. Knowing this, Ellis made a few inquiries when Mrs Basket was clearing the breakfast-table. Harry having already departed to Fleet Street, the doctor was alone, and conducted the examination as he pleased and at his leisure. Mrs Basket, only too willing to talk, chattered like a parrot, and, indeed, her green dress with yellow trimmings resembled the plumage of that bird in no small degree. She was a gaudy, irresponsible gabbler.

"Bless your 'eart, sir, she didn't know no one," declared Mrs Basket. "A prisoner in a gaol, that is what she was at Myrtle Viller; not but what she oughtn't to be in a real one. I don't say as that Moxton," Mrs Basket shiverered, "wasn't a brute in his treatment of her, but she did for him as sure as I'm a living woman. She did for him."

"The jury did not think so, Mrs Basket!"

Mrs Basket snorted. "A jury of them swindling tradesmen," said she, contemptuously. "What do they know of it? Mrs Moxton killed him with the carving-knife, and threw it away afterwards."

"How do you know she threw it away?"

"'Cos it ain't in the 'ouse. Yes! you may look, an' look, doctor, but it ain't in the 'ouse. I've bin there and know."

"You have been in Myrtle Villa?" said Ellis, astonished. "Do you know Mrs Moxton, then?"

"For the sake of law and order and Queen's justice I made it my business to know her, sir. The other morning I went over to offer to buy some of her furniture, 'earing as she was leaving Dukesfield."

Ellis jumped up. "She is not leaving Dukesfield," he denied.

"Oh, that was my idear of getting into the 'ouse," explained Mrs Basket, complacently. "She said she wasn't, and told me so in the kitching, where it was I wished to be. Then she looked so poorly that I offered to make 'er a cup of tea, and she said I might, asking me questions about the people 'ere in the meantime."

"What sort of questions?"

"Oh, what was thought of her, and if they called her names," returned Mrs Basket, incoherently. "But I made 'er the tea and she 'ad it. For a few mintues she went into the front parlour, and I looked in all the dresser drawers for the knife, but it wasn't there. No, doctor," repeated Mrs Basket, with emphasis, "I do assure you it wasn't in the 'ole of that there kitching, though I searched most perticler."

"Someone might have stolen the knife."

"There weren't nobody in the 'ouse to steal it. Not a soul ever went near the viller but tradesmen, and they never got no further than the back door. Sir, I do believe as she murdered him with the knife, and 'id it way arterwards—p'raps in them brick-fields," concluded Mrs Basket, vaguely.

"Well, we can't be sure of that.

You are certain that Mrs Moxton had no visitors?"

"Quite, sir."

"And she saw no one?"

"Not a blessed soul save 'er usband as she did for. And if you'll excuse me, doctor, I've my work to look arter," whereupon the gossip waddled away with the breakfast tray.

It may appear strange that a cultured man like Ellis should listen to the coarse babblings of an uneducated woman, but he had a reason for doing so. For the sake of protecting Mrs Moxton it was needful that he should know the gossip of the neighbourhood, and none could so well enlighten him on this point as Mrs Basket. Several times her openly-expressed conviction of Mrs Moxton's guilt made Ellis wince, and but for the above reason he would have ordered her out of the room. However, his self-control gained him two pieces of information; firstly, that Mrs Moxton had received no masculine visitor since her arrival in Dukesfield; and secondly, that the carving-knife with which the murder—from the nature of the wound—might have been committed, had disappeared. Ellis was now satisfied that the widow had no lover, but he was disturbed over the concealment or loss—he did not know which to call it—of the carving-knife. If no one but Mrs Moxton was, or had been, in the house, she must know the whereabouts of the knife. For enlightenment on this point, and in order to satisfy his doubts, Ellis made up his mind

to call on the widow, and, acting on the impulse of the moment, did so.

Strangely enough Mrs Moxton not only welcomed him eagerly, but informed him that his arrival was opportune. "If you had not come I should have sent for you," said she, and conducted him into a cheerful little sitting-room all white paint, Chinese matting, and furniture covered with bright-hued chintz.

"What is the matter, Mrs Moxton? There is nothing wrong, I hope."

"Oh, no! but I want your advice. You are my only friend."

"I am proud of the position, Mrs Moxton, and I hope you will permit me, as a friend, to ask you a few plain questions?"

The little woman's resolute face grew pale. "About the death?" she murmured.

"Yes! You know that there is a slur on your name in connection with that. As your friend, I wish to remove that slur by assisting you to hunt down the murderer."

It was an odd but true thing that Mrs Moxton had the same habit as Ellis of walking up and down the room when annoyed. At the conclusion of the doctor's last speech she rose suddenly and took a turn to compose her mind. "It is very good of you to think of helping me," she said abruptly, "but why should you?"

"Because I wish to be your friend, and I know that you are in danger."

"I am in no danger if you allude to this preposterous accusa-

tion that I killed my husband. If needs be I can protect myself should the occasion arise."

"By denouncing someone else?"

Mrs Moxton turned on Ellis with a frown.

"What do you mean?"

"Rumour says that if you did not murder Moxton yourself you know who did, and that you are shielding him."

"Him! Oh, I am shielding a man," said the widow, catching at the final word. "Set your mind at rest, doctor, I am shielding no man."

"Mrs Moxton, why not be candid and tell me all?"

"I told all I knew at the inquest," she replied sullenly.

"Can you swear that you do not know who killed your husband?"

"I was on my oath at the inquest, I tell you," cried the woman, passionately. "I will not swear again—to you."

"Very good," said Ellis, coldly. "I see that you doubt me."

"I doubt you! I trust you more than you think. Doctor Ellis, in spite of what I said to you before, I am surrounded on all sides by difficulties and dangers. One false step and Heaven knows what may happen! I can't tell you all—I dare not. But you are my friend and must help me."

"How can I when you won't confess the truth?"

"If I only dare!" Mrs Moxton took another turn up the room, and came back to Ellis with a more determined expression on her face. "Listen, doctor! I

will tell you what I can. Afterwards you can ask me what questions you will, and I shall reply to the best of my ability. Thus we shall understand one another."

Ellis looked at her trim little figure in the black dress, at the widow's cap on the fair hair, at the candid face beneath it. As has been before stated, Mrs Moxton was comely rather than pretty, but she had a firmly-moulded chin, a resolute expression on her lips and in her grey eyes, and was, on the whole, a woman of courage and resource. How one so sensible could have tied herself to a brute like Moxton, and could have submitted to neglect and cruelty for long months, was more than Ellis could understand. Perhaps it was one of those unanswerable problems of the feminine nature which women themselves cannot explain. Ellis was puzzled, and in the hope of gaining some insight into this apparently contradictory nature, waited eagerly for the promised explanation.

"On the day after the murder—in the morning, that is," said Mrs Moxton, "I had a visitor. His card, with the name Richard Busham, was brought to me by a charwoman I engaged, but owing to the events of the previous night I refused to see him. He went away saying he would call again, but up to the present he has not done so."

"Who is Richard Busham? Do you know him?"

"Not personally. I never saw him, and he has never met me.

But he is the cousin of my late husband, the nephew of Moxton of Bond Street. Now, I believe that he came to see me about the will, and I am vexed at not having admitted him."

"Why not call on him? Have you his address?"

"I heard it from Edgar. Mr Busham is a solicitor, and has his office in Esher Lane, near the Temple. The late Mr Moxton, of Bond Street, was a mean, shabby man who employed the cheapest labour he could get, and I believe his nephew did all his legal business for him. Now, Edgar and Mr Busham hated one another, and when my husband was disinherited Mr Busham was declared heir by old Moxton. If that will held good he would not waste time coming to see me, but from the very fact of his visit I believe that Edgar's father repented at the last moment, and made a new will, leaving the property to us."

"You can make certain of that by seeing Busham."

Mrs Moxton looked troubled. "I am afraid," she said faintly. "I am terribly afraid."

"I do not see why you should be."

"Mr Busham called on the morning after the murder; he must have learnt then of my loss. Yet he has never repeated his visit, has never written a line. I can't conceive his reason for acting in this way, unless," here she hesitated, "he believes that I murdered Edgar."

"He would not be so foolish as to believe that without evidence;

and even if he did, the inquest must have disabused his mind of the idea."

"For all that I am afraid to call. I have heard Edgar talk of Mr Busham; he is a dangerous man, Dr Ellis, and for all I know may be laying a trap for me."

"Tell me the truth and I will prevent your falling into this trap."

Mrs Moxton hesitated, and then burst out defiantly: "What is it you wish to know?"

"Firstly if you know the meaning of the blood signs on your husband's arm?"

"No! I do not."

"Then I am wiser than you, for I do."

"You!" Mrs Moxton bit her lip. "What do you know?"

"That the signs stand for the letters R. U. Z. What the lizard, as I think it is, means I don't know. Mrs Moxton, what is the meaning of the three letters R. U. Z.?"

"I don't know, really I don't!"

"Had your husband any friend with a name beginning Ruz, or with initials R. U. Z.?"

"Not that I ever heard of."

"What about the lizard?"

"I cannot understand its meaning."

"And you don't comprehend either the letters or the cypher?"

"No! no! no!"

This triple denial was so emphatic that Ellis was forced to believe her. Yet it appeared strange that she should be so ignorant of matters which virtually concerned the death of her husband. He looked keenly at her for some sign of confusion, but

the brow of Mrs Moxton was as open as the day. If she lied she was a wonderful actress, but Ellis did not believe that she lied, being too much in love to consider her so deliberately base.

"Well!" said he, making an attempt in another direction to fathom the mystery. "My landlady, Mrs Basket, called to see you the other day."

"To spy out the land. Oh, I saw through her pretended kindness at once. She wished to find some proof of my guilt, but as I had nothing to conceal I gave her the opportunity of convincing herself that I was innocent."

"The very proof you gave convinced her of your guilt," said Ellis, warmly. "Mrs Basket is a dangerous woman, Mrs Moxton; one of those well-meaning people who do so much harm. She has no special grudge against you, but she has got it into her mind that you killed your husband with the carving-knife."

"But I did not. It is nonsense talking like that!"

"Then where is the carving-knife? Mrs Basket searched but could not find it, and now she believes that you have hidden it."

"What rubbish!" said Mrs Moxton, with contempt. "Edgar threw it away."

"Threw it away? Why?"

"Because he knew that I kept it by me to protect myself against tramps or burglars, so, out of sheer devilry, the week before he died, he threw it into the garden behind some bushes."

"Is it there now?"

"No. I searched everywhere

for it after the murder and could not find it. Why do you ask?"

"Because a broad-bladed knife was used to kill your husband, and it might have been the carving-knife. The murderer must have picked it up and made use of it. And—"

The woman appeared uneasy, and interrupted Ellis. "How would the murderer know that the knife was in the garden? Only two people knew where it was thrown. One was Edgar, the other myself."

"I would not advise you to say that in public, Mrs Moxton, as people might count it as good circumstantial evidence that you killed Moxton."

"Oh!" cried the widow, clenching her fists. "Do you believe me guilty?"

"No, I do not. Is there any need to ask me that question?"

"Why? why? You have plenty of evidence against me. I have placed myself in your hands by confessing about the carving-knife. Why do you not denounce me as guilty?"

"How can you ask?" cried Ellis, carried out of his usual equable self by her vehemence. "Don't you know—can't you see—I love you! I love you! that is why I believe you guiltless."

CHAPTER VI

A FRESH DISCOVERY

IN placing herself in the dock, so to speak, Mrs Moxton had been defiant, loud-voiced and reckless,

daring Ellis to denounce her for a crime of which she knew herself innocent. His refusal, and the cause he gave for such refusal, took her by surprise. Long since she had guessed that the doctor loved her, but she did not count on his proclaiming the fact so soon. Nor would he have done so had he not been thrown off his guard by her appeal. But her demand and his answer to it produced on both sides a stupefied calm. Ellis, frightened at his own boldness, remained silent after uttering the fatal words; Mrs Moxton, on the other hand, felt her wrath die away in sheer surprise. Then her cheeks flushed from an unexplained emotion, and a light beamed from her eyes.

"You love me!" she murmured softly, and looked at Ellis.

Something in her regard, her tone, in her whole attitude, seemed to melt the frozen silence of the man. He sprang forward and touched her hand.

"You are not angry?" he asked, with eagerness.

The touch recalled Mrs Moxton to a sense of what she owed to herself, and woke in her a feeling of wrath at the audacity of the man, who could speak the word to a woman lately widowed in so terrible a manner.

"How dare you!" she cried angrily, retreating. "What must you think of me to talk like that!"

"I think the world of you," replied Ellis, doggedly. "I have said the truth."

"You deceive yourself. What you take for the truth is

fantasy. You cannot love one whom you have known only three weeks."

"Love can be born of a glance."

"In romances, I grant, but not in real life." She paused and burst out laughing. "Oh, it is too absurd."

Ellis was piqued. "I fail to see the absurdity. I speak as I feel."

For the moment Mrs Moxton appeared to meditate an answer to this plain statement. Suddenly she bit her lip, drew back and shook her head. "You speak folly. You think madness," she said. "Consider! I am a three weeks' widow. My husband died by violence, and his death is not avenged. My name is smirched. My—no! This is no time for such talk. Let us forget the words you have uttered."

"I cannot forget."

"Then I must lose my friend," said Mrs Moxton, determinedly. "I really cannot meet you on these terms. I am a newly-made widow, not a possible wife for you."

"But in the future?"

"Let the future look after itself," she cried petulantly. "What we have to do, is to attend to the present. You wish to help me. Do so by leaving this crime to be punished by Heaven."

"But your smirched name?"

"I can bear that. I have borne worse things. Oh, do not look so astonished, Dr Ellis. I have had a queer up-and-down, topsy-turvy sort of life. Some day I may tell it to you, but we don't know each other well enough for that yet. If

I find that you deserve my confidence——” She broke off the sentence abruptly. “Never mind that now. I have work to do. Yes! I shall take your advice about calling on Mr Busham. This very day I shall call and ask him about the will. Could you meet me here at three o'clock, doctor?”

Ellis felt his breath taken away by the boldness of the demand.

“If you wish me to come.”

“Of course I wish it, or I would not ask. Remember, doctor, you are my friend. No, don't repeat that folly. We are comrades at present, nothing more. You do not understand me now. You will when I explain.”

“Will you ever explain?”

“Yes! No! I can't say. So much depends upon what kind of a man I find you to be. Now, go, please, as I must dress for my visit. Mind, I shall expect you at three o'clock, to tell you the result of my interview.”

“At three o'clock,” repeated Ellis, earnestly, and so they parted.

When the doctor found himself in the broad, cheerful sunshine of the Jubilee Road he was not quite certain if he was asleep or awake. To him Mrs Moxton was more of an enigma than the murder itself. He could not understand her attitude, nor could he guess what motive she had in acting thus strangely. She was apparently pleased that he loved her; she was angry at his abrupt declaration; he could not gain her confidence; yet she requested him to meet her at three o'clock to ask his advice about her visit. What

was he to understand from such a medley of contradictions? He sought in his own mind for every possible explanation, but could find none, so concluding that it was the more sensible course to possess his soul in patience until this sphinx explained her own riddle, he returned home. Here, to his surprise, he found a friend of the morbid lady's come to consult him about her heart, and in the joy of such promise of an increasing practice he forgot Mrs Moxton and her eccentricities. In a similar situation a woman would not have forgotten, but Byron's lines give the reason for that:

“Man's love is of man's life a thing apart;
'Tis woman's whole existence.”

Nevertheless, when his mind was less occupied with material things, the feeling about Mrs Moxton revived, and he waited impatiently for the hour of three. It would seem that circumstances were about to involve him in the drama—it might be tragedy—of this woman's life, and he felt eager for the call to step on the stage. What part would be assigned to him he could not guess. Was he to be the husband of the heroine or merely the friend, or would he pose as the foil to that shadowy lover in whose existence and guilt Cass believed? Altogether Ellis was in the dark, afraid to venture forward for fear of the unknown. He waited for a hand to draw him on to his doom—in plain English, for the hand and guidance of Mrs Moxton. These

strange thoughts, passing through the doctor's mind, made him fear that its usually accurate balance was disturbed.

Shortly after three o'clock struck from the bran-new brick tower of the bran-new Dukesfield church, he saw her walking briskly down the road. Even in his pre-occupation he noted her trim figure, the decided way in which she set down and lifted her feet, and the general air of alert resolution which stamped her whole being. Here was a woman of mind, of decision, of character, with few feminine failings, and more than ever Ellis wondered at her past history, as related by herself at the inquest. He began to suspect that there might be something after all in the ideas of Harry Cass. Mrs Basket declared the woman "was a deep 'un." That also might be true.

"Good news! good news!" cried Mrs Moxton, when she arrived. "I have seen Mr Busham and I am right. Old Moxton made a will leaving the property to Edgar."

"But he is dead. How do you stand now?"

The widow let the gate click behind her, and walked up the path with a wrinkled brow, betokening thought. "That depends upon Edgar's will."

"Did he make one?"

"I think so. In one of his good humours he made a will leaving all his property to me. I believe the will was signed and witnessed at Monte Carlo. He told me about it, but I never saw it."

"Then how do you know it exists?"

"Edgar told me of it," repeated Mrs Moxton. "It will no doubt be in his despatch-box, or in this room."

By this time the pair were again in the cheerful parlour, and her gaze was fixed upon a well-filled bookcase. "I should not wonder if it was hidden amongst the books," said Mrs Moxton, pensively.

Ellis showed some amazement at this strange remark. "Why should he have put a valuable document amongst his books, Mrs Moxton?"

The widow sat down and signed to Ellis to do likewise. "My dear doctor, do you know anything about drunken men?"

This was even a stranger remark than the former.

"I have come into contact with them," said Ellis, with a slight smile, "but what has that to do with this will?"

"More than you think," she retorted. "Edgar was never very sane at the best of times; but when drunk, as he often was, he took leave of his senses completely. Drunken men, as I dare-say you know, have each their various idiosyncrasies which display the true animal within. Edgar's indwelling animal was a magpie."

"Oh!" The doctor seized on her meaning at once. "You believe that he concealed things!"

"Yes! When drunk he would hide his watch, chain, jewellery, money, and when sober could not remember where he put them. I was set to hunt them out, and often found them in that book-

case. Lately he took to hiding papers, so it is not unlikely he concealed his will. However, it may be in his despatch-box after all. That is in the bedroom, and I have the keys, so I shall go and look. In the meantime, doctor, would you turn out those books and see if it is concealed there?"

"Certainly; but one moment, Mrs Moxton," he added, as she was about to leave the room; "if your husband has left no will, what becomes of the property?"

"Half goes to Mr Busham as the next-of-kin, and half to me as the widow, but, of course, I get all if Edgar left a will in my favour."

"Mr Busham won't like that."

"No!" Mrs Moxton frowned. "I'll tell you what he is," she burst out; "a mean, grasping miser. His manner to me was most disagreeable. I feel sure he suspects me of the murder. While he can get half the property I daresay he will hold his tongue, but if all comes to me I am certain he will make trouble."

"About the murder?"

"Yes, but I am not afraid. I can defend myself, and I have you for a friend."

"But what can I do?"

"Defend me!" Mrs Moxton threw a searching glance at the amazed face of Ellis. "Look for the will," she said abruptly, and left the room.

By this time the doctor's capacity for astonishment was completely exhausted. Mrs Moxton's conduct became more extraordinary at every interview, and it was worse than useless trying

to account for it. Only further acquaintance and observation could explain her personality and apparently purposeless remarks; therefore Ellis, taking this sensible view, devoted himself to the task of searching for the will.

The bookcase was of white-painted wood, of no great size, and with three shelves. French novels in yellow and green paper covers predominated, and Ellis tumbled these ruthlessly on to the floor. To all appearance the taste of the late Mr Moxton had not been over-refined, for the majority of the novels were by the most sensual Parisian authors. But mingled with these decadent works were a number of old-fashioned books, mostly educational, with here and there a slim old-fashioned volume of travels. For the first ten minutes of his search Ellis paid no attention to these, but looked for the will at the back of the shelves. It was not to be found in any one of them, but he came across an amazing number of music-hall programmes, headed: "The Merry-man, Viper Street, Soho." Evidently someone had been an assiduous attendant at this place of amusement, if the programmes were to be taken as evidence.

"Moxton!" said Ellis to himself, when this idea occurred to him. "So this is where he went night after night." He examined the dates of the programmes. "Yes! all within the last three months, one night after another. H'm! Mrs Moxton said that she did not know where her husband went, yet these programmes must

have informed her even if he held histongue. Extraordinary woman! I can't understand her actions or denials."

Failing to find the will on the shelves, Ellis examined the books. One of these, a fat little brown volume, entitled *The Universal Informer*, was inscribed on the flyleaf, "Janet Gordon, from her father, Thomas Gordon, Edinburgh," both of which names were unknown to Ellis. The book opened of itself at a turned-down page, on which was set forth a list of the towns and cities of the world. Now, what struck Ellis as strange was the fact that the turned-down page was towards the end of the list, and contained the towns beginning with "Z." This was one of the letters concealed in the blood signs, and to say the least it is not a letter generally used. Wondering if he was on the track of a discovery, Ellis glanced down the page. His eye caught the word "lizard," and he eagerly read the paragraph in which it was contained. Four lines informed him that "Zirknitz is a town in Austria, and that in its environs is found a peculiar species of lizard." Ellis reflected. "On the arm was the letter 'Z' concealed in a sign, and the representation of a lizard. This book, which opens of itself at this particular page, mentions an Austrian town called Zirknitz and a peculiar lizard. There must be some connection between the murder and this paragraph, but I can't see it myself. What can an Austrian town have to do with the crime in Jubilee Road?"

Finding no answer to this question he pursued his search. The old-fashioned books seemed to belong to Thomas Gordon, of Edinburgh, but in one or two he had inscribed their presentation to his "daughter Janet," or to his "daughter Laura."

"Laura!" murmured Ellis. "That is Mrs Moxton's name. Perhaps she is the Laura Gordon who owns these books. In fact, she must be. If so, she has a sister Janet; it is the first I have heard of her sister. Hullo, what's this?"

"This" was a novel of Catulle Mendes, which had a name scribbled in pencil on the outside. The name was "Rudolph Zirknitz."

"R U Z," said the doctor, staring at the pencilled autograph; "so it stands for Rudolph Zirknitz, who evidently takes his name and the totem of the lizard from that Austrian town."

At this moment Mrs Moxton entered with a disconsolate air. "Have you found the will, doctor?" she inquired; "it is not in the despatch-box."

"No, Mrs Moxton, I have not found the will, but I have learnt the name of the man who killed your husband."

The widow became as grey as the wall-paper, and leant against the door for support. "What? Who? I—I do not understand," she gasped.

"The murderer is called Rudolph Zirknitz," explained Ellis. "Now, who is Rudolph Zirknitz?"

Mrs Moxton made no attempt to answer this question. Closing her eyes she slipped quietly on to

the floor, and lay at the feet of Ellis, white and insensible.

CHAPTER VII

WHAT THE CABMAN KNEW

WHEN Cass returned from his day's work he found Ellis impatiently expecting him. The doctor looked ill and worried. On hearing his friend's footstep he rushed into the passage and half-led, half-dragged him into the room. Harry was much surprised at this unusual excitement on the part of Ellis.

"What the deuce is the matter, Bob? You are as pale as a muffin, and your hair is all over the—"

"Harry! Harry! Never mind my looks. I am nearly worried out of my life by this—this murderer."

"Or by Mrs Moxton—have you made any discoveries?"

"Yes. I have discovered the meaning of the letters R U Z, and of the lizard sign."

"By Jove!" Cass in his turn became excited. "Well, well, go on—go on."

"The letters are the initials of a man's name."

"The murderer's name?"

"I don't say that, and yet he might be the criminal. I said so to—"

"But the name, Bob, the name?"

"Rudolph Zirknitz."

"H'm! A foreigner?"

"An Austrian. He takes his name from a town called Zirknitz, in Austria, which has in its

environs a peculiar sort of lizard found nowhere else."

"Ho! ho! Now comes in the 'totem' of our assassin. How did you find this out?"

The doctor sat down and rapidly detailed his discoveries, and how they were brought about by the search for the will. "I revived Mrs Moxton from her faint," he concluded, "but she refused to answer a single question. In the end I was forced to leave her, and for the last few hours I have been in a state of distraction. I am so glad you are back. Put your sharp wits to work, Harry, and tell me what it all means."

"I told you before," replied Cass, coolly, "and you flew in a rage with me, saying that I had no grounds for the statement. Now you have learned the grounds, and I repeat my belief. This Zirknitz is the lover of Mrs Moxton, and she is shielding him from the consequences of having killed her husband—no doubt at her request."

"I can't—I won't believe it of that poor woman, Harry."

"Facts are stubborn things, Bob. The case is as clear as noonday to me."

Ellis, still believing in the innocence of the woman he loved, would have replied somewhat violently to this declaration, but that Mrs Basket entered with the supper. It was now seven o'clock, for since Cass had been appointed critic to the *Early Bird* they had altered the meal from nine to seven. In a few minutes Mrs Basket, not being encouraged to chatter on this particular night,

left the room, wondering what could be the matter with her gentlemen. Ellis trifled with his food, feeling too worried to enjoy it, but the less nervous Cass did full justice to Mrs Basket's idea of an Irish stew. Between mouthfuls he talked and answered the doctor's objections.

"It is all nonsense Mrs Basket saying that Mrs Moxton had no visitors. Both she and her husband, from what you tell me, must be shady people. Poor devil! He is dead, so let us say no ill of him. But Mrs Moxton. I daresay she received visitors at night when Mrs Basket and her tradesmen spies were not about."

"You have no grounds for making such an accusation," fumed Ellis.

"Keep calm, Bob. I am speaking without prejudice. No grounds! Well, if I have not, why did Mrs Moxton faint at the mention of that name? Why did she lie about the signs? Why did she feign ignorance of the place where her husband went every night? She must have known. I tell you, Bob, that Mrs Moxton is fighting every inch, and I daresay she is angry at your persistence in following up the case. Come, now, own up! Did she not ask you to leave the matter alone?"

"Well, she did," admitted the doctor, with reluctance. "I confess that I do not understand Mrs Moxton. Her acts are doubtful, her words are strange, and I agree with you that she knows more about this matter than she chooses to confess. All the same, Harry, I am not an absolute fool, even

where women are concerned; and there is something in Mrs Moxton's looks and manner which satisfies me that she is a true, good, pure, brave woman."

"H'm! her conduct does not justify the use of a single adjective of that sort."

"I know! I know! All the same, I believe in her."

"Because you are in love, and love is blind."

"Rubbish! I don't believe in that worn-out saying; I can see Mrs Moxton's imperfections as plainly as you can. She is not a saint by any manner of means,—but a sinner? No, Harry, I cannot believe she is what you make her out. If she inspired the murder, why does she not run away?"

"Because she is fighting for her fortune, old boy."

"But she is not even certain that a will is in existence."

"So she says," replied Cass, pouring himself out some beer; "but I beg leave to doubt that artless pose. It is my firm conviction that she knew of old Moxton's repentance and eleventh-hour testament, that she got her husband to make his will in her favour, and that she induced her lover, Zirknitz, to put him out of the way so that they might enjoy the money together. It is to reap the fruits of the crime that she stays on here, Bob."

"That is all theory."

"So was my earlier statement, yet it has been proved true by yourself. I daresay M. Zirknitz came to see Mrs Moxton in the evening when her husband was at the Merryman Music-Hall."

"I never heard of that place, Harry."

"Perhaps not. It has been in existence only for two years. The usual variety entertainment, you know. A man called Otto Schwartz keeps it."

"A German?"

"A typical lager-beer German. Not at all a bad fellow, either."

Doctor Ellis slowly lighted his pipe. "I wonder why Moxton went so regularly to that place?" he said reflectively.

"Well, he might have gone there to make love to one of the ladies who do the turns, but I rather think," said Cass, significantly, "that his object was to gamble. From all his wife says about Monte Carlo and other places the man was a confirmed card-sharper."

"But gambling is not allowed in London."

"No doubt. A good many vices are not allowed in this most immaculate of cities, in this *Tartuffe* of capitals, but they exist all the same. I don't know for certain, nobody does, but it is rumoured that there is a secret gambling-hell connected with the apparently innocent music-hall of Herr Schwartz's."

Ellis glanced at his watch. "It is getting on for eight o'clock," he remarked. "Let us go to Soho to-night."

"If you like. I have no particular engagement. But your reason?"

"I want to learn all I can about Moxton. If he went there to gamble, Herr Schwartz will know of him. Also we might learn

something of Zirknitz. As the book proves, the autograph also, he was a friend of Moxton's, so it is not unlikely he went with him to this secret hell you talk of."

"Very good; let us go at once," said Cass, rising. "But as you and I seem to have become amateur detectives, let us conduct our case with due discretion. There is one piece of evidence we have overlooked."

"What is that?"

"The cab-stand."

"The cab-stand! And what has that to do with the murder?"

"Bob! Bob! You can write about eyes and their diseases, but you cannot make use of your own optics. It is probable that the murderer of Moxton, this Zirknitz, wished to get away as speedily as possible from the scene of his crime, so it is equally probable that he made for the cab-stand."

"Or the railway station."

"That is much further away. The cab-stand is comparatively near the Jubilee Road."

"But no cabman came forward at the inquest."

"I daresay. No cabman had any right to suspect his fare of murder. But we will question those on the rank before we go to Soho. Let us find out if Mr Zirknitz took a cab between a quarter-past and half-past eleven."

Ellis shrugged his shoulders. "As you please. But it seems to me futile to waste time in asking questions which cannot be answered."

"We have yet to learn if our time is being wasted," retorted Cass; and ending the conversation

for the time being, the young men left the house.

By this time Cass had become quite eager to solve the mystery, and willingly placed his quick wit and indomitable perseverance at the service of his friend. He admired Ellis greatly, and there was quite a David and Jonathan feeling between the two. It annoyed Cass to think that the doctor might throw away his life on such a woman as he believed Mrs Moxton to be; and he undertook the case in the hope of proving her unworthiness. At the present moment appearances were decidedly against her, yet in the face of such black evidence Ellis still clung to his belief in her. This instinctive feeling, based on no reasonable foundation, was so insisted upon by Ellis that his friend became quite angry.

"It is the most sensible men who become the greatest fools on occasions," he said, with the rough speech of intimate friendship. "You have known this woman only three weeks, and you are absolutely ignorant of her past life save what she has chosen to tell you. The circumstantial and actual evidence points to her not only as a shady person, but as a positive criminal, yet in the face of it all you look upon her as a saint."

"No, I don't. I told you so before; but I feel sure she is a good woman. I can give you no reason, but I myself am satisfied without one. As to your evidence, Harry, you know the most innocent person can be wrongly

accused, can be even hanged on evidence which, false as it is, appears sufficient. There is the Lesurques case, for——"

"Oh! the Courier of Lyons, I know. And I can quote you at least a dozen others. All the same, I don't believe in Mrs Moxton."

"Well, I do. For all you know she may be protecting her sister."

Cass stopped short. "Has she a sister?" he asked.

"I believe so. At least, in the books I told you about, Thomas Gordon had written the names of his daughters Laura and Janet Gordon. The first is, of course, Mrs Moxton, the second name must be that of her sister."

"Perhaps. But the sister may be dead, may be absent from England. In any event, I do not see how you can connect her at all with the murder."

The doctor had no reply to this pertinent observation, as, after all, his remark about the sister had been made vaguely and without any ulterior meaning. A turn of the street brought them to the cab-stand, at which Cass, as a journalist, was well known. He immediately began to question the men in a chaffing, popular way. They were ready enough to answer his questions, the more so as these were concerning the murder; but one and all declared that no particular man had hired a cab between eleven and twelve on the night of August 16th.

"Old Ike is the one to know, though," said a red-faced cabman. "He 'ave a memory like 'is own 'orse."

There was a murmur of assent at this, and old Ike, shaky, lean, ancient, more like a grey wolf than a man, was routed out of the shelter in which he was refreshing himself with tea.

"A fare on that murder night, sir? Lor', I don't quite know wot t' say 'bout that. 'Leven an' twelve was it? Well, now, sir, the chapsies at that time were at the station waiting the theyater trains. Weren't you, chapsies?"

"Ah! that we were, but you worn't, Ike," said the red-faced cabman, replying for the others. "You never does go fur them late fares."

"I wos alone on the rank, Mr Cass, now I thinks of it, and I 'ad a fare to Pimlico, to Geneva Square, where that Silent 'Ouse murder took place."

"What was the man like?" asked Ellis, eagerly.

"It weren't no man, sir, but a gal, a short gal with a grey dress and a black cloak, straw 'at, fair hair, plump figger, and small 'ands."

"Why, Cass, he is describing Mrs Moxton," said Ellis wonderingly. "At what time did she take your cab, Ike?"

"Just afore arf-past 'leven, sir. Came tearing down the road wild-like and crying fit to break 'er 'eart. Jus' tumbled into m'keb, she did, an' tole me to drive t' Pimlico."

"Mrs Moxton was in our room at half-past eleven," said Cass, when finding that this was all the information obtainable they walked away. "The woman can't be Mrs Moxton. Yet the descrip-

tion fair hair, trim figure, might pass for her. I wonder who she is?"

"I know, Harry. I was right, after all. The woman who cried and fled like a guilty person was Janet Gordon, the sister of Mrs Moxton."

CHAPTER VIII

A MUSIC-HALL STAR

IT would seem, then, from this fresh discovery, that a third person was implicated in the matter, and that person a woman. Cass and Ellis argued the matter at great length in the train, and continued their argument as they drove from St James's Station to Soho. The doctor was convinced from old Ike's description that the woman could be no other than Mrs Moxton's sister, but Cass was more than doubtful.

"It might be a general resemblance," he said. "Besides, if Janet Gordon came to see Mrs Moxton on that night, why does not her sister say so?"

"She is shielding her, I tell you," insisted Ellis. "That accounts for the way in which she keeps silent even to me, whom she knows as her friend."

"Why should Mrs Moxton shield her sister, Bob? You don't suspect Janet of the crime?"

"Oh, no. From the blood signs it is plain that Zirknitz murdered him. I don't know what to think. But it is plain that Janet was at the house that night, and perhaps she fled in terror on seeing the crime committed. However, I

shall ask Mrs Moxton about the matter."

"She will tell you nothing."

"Now that I have found out so much I think she will, if only to exonerate her sister," retorted Ellis. "If she refuses, I shall go to Geneva Square, in Pimlico, and interview Miss Gordon myself. She may have seen Zirknitz kill the poor devil, and then have fled to avoid being mixed up in the matter."

"Well," said Cass, as the cab drew up before a brilliantly-lighted portal, "it seems to me that Zirknitz is the man to catch and question. We may hear about him here, as it appears he was a companion of the dead man. But the case gets more involved at every fresh discovery. First we suspect Mrs Moxton, then our suspicions rest on the Austrian, finally an unknown sister seems to be implicated in the matter. It will be a queer story when all things are brought to light. I hope we shall find Zirknitz here."

"If he is a wise man you will not," replied Ellis, as they alighted. "Remember, a *fac-simile* of these blood signs appeared in all the papers. Zirknitz may know the cypher, and, having read his own initials, has, no doubt, made himself scarce."

"H'm! There is something in that. We shall see."

The music-hall was vast and palatial, with a domed roof, two galleries, and much ornate decoration. The seats were cushioned with red velvet, the promenades were carpeted. In many corners tall mirrors reflected back the

moving crowd, and everywhere there was gilding, light, crystal and colour. The whole place was filled with changing hues like a king-opal, and glittered with overpowering splendour in the floods of white radiance pouring from clusters of electric lamps. A fine orchestra was playing a swinging waltz, the last movement of a ballet, and the stage was filled with a multitude of gyrating, pirouetting women, constantly moving and tossing in gorgeous costumes, like a bed of tulips in a high wind. For a few moments the two men, coming out of the dark night, were dazzled by the glare, and stunned by the crash of the music and babel of voices. Cass drew his friend aside to a marble-topped table and ordered drinks while he looked at the programme. Suddenly he caught sight of a man he knew and jumped up to shake hands.

"Hullo! Schwartz," he cried. "Here is a friend of mine I wish to introduce. Captain Garret, I hope I see you well?"

The German was a fat, fair man, quiet in looks and dress, and with a somewhat careworn face. His companion, a tall, dissipated, military gentleman, in accurate evening dress, answered to the name of Garret, and bowed distantly. This latter had a bad expression and a pair of shifty eyes.

"Ah, mine goot Cass," said Schwartz, with a beaming smile, "you haf not been here for dis long time. And your frend?"

"Dr Ellis," said Cass; "a well-known medical man, who has written a standard work on 'Diseases of the Eye.'"

Ellis laughed, and was about to protest against having this greatness thrust upon him, when Captain Garret turned his worn face towards him with a look of keen interest.

"Dr Ellis," said he, in an abrupt voice, "glad to see you, very glad. Have read your book, so has Schwartz here."

"Dat is zo, mine frend. It is a goot book, and I am glad zat you come here, doctor. Why did you not zay you come, Cass? I would haf given tickets."

"Both of you have read my book?" said the doctor, considerably taken aback by this unexpected fame. "In Heaven's name why? It is unusual for laymen to read a treatise of that kind."

"Ah," replied Garret, with infinite sadness, "Schwartz and I are old friends, and we have good reason to read your book." He paused for a moment, then added abruptly: "My daughter is blind."

"Ach! Zat liddle Hilda. She has gatterack of the eyes, poor ancel."

"My daughter has cataract of the eyes, doctor," translated Garret, "and we have tried every surgeon in Europe to cure them, but without success. Your book impressed us greatly, and now that we have met you I hope you will come and see my poor girl."

"Come and zee her effry tay, doctor. I vill pay money. If zat

— Schwartz never finished his speech. At that moment a tumult, created by some drunken man, called him away, and with a nod to Ellis he hurried off. The Cap-

tain waited only long enough to thrust his card into the doctor's hand, and also departed, while the two friends resumed their seats at the table.

"Captain W. E. Garret, Goethe Cottage, Alma Road, Parkmere," read Ellis from the card. "Why, that is the next suburb to Dukesfield."

"Oh, Schwartz lives in that quarter, does he?"

"No! not Schwartz—Garret."

"That is the same thing," replied Cass, sipping his brandy and soda; "they live together—have done so for years. Garret has the gentlemanly looks, and Schwartz the money."

"A strange pair. Who are they?"

"A couple of adventurers. Schwartz is the better of the two, though; for, from what I hear, Garret was kicked out of the army for cheating at cards. The German started this show two years ago, and took Garret to live with him; why, I don't know, unless it is that he is so fond of the daughter."

"Hilda Garret," said Ellis, recalling the name; "is she blind?"

"I believe so. Schwartz is an old bachelor, and has given all his heart to the poor girl. She is sixteen years old, I believe, and he takes care both of her and her father."

"Garret seems to be fond of his child."

"Oh, that is a pose for the benefit of Schwartz. If he didn't love Hilda the German would kick him out. Garret killed his wife with ill-treatment, and was on the fair

way to exterminate Hilda when Schwartz interposed and became her good angel. Now the old scoundrel, Garret, behaves well to her, knowing that in such way he can manage Schwartz."

"You seem to know all about it, Cass!"

"I hear all the gossip, Bob. It may be true or it may not, but I am certain that Schwartz and Garret have been together these ten years carrying on their rascalities."

"Are they rascals?"

Cass laughed and nodded. "Rumour says very much so, but Schwartz is the more lovable scoundrel of the two. There is something pathetic in the way in which he clings to that blind girl."

"There lives some soul of good in all things evil," quoted Ellis. "Well, I shall call at Goethe Cottage and see what I can do for the girl. If I can cure her after all the European surgeons have failed it will be a feather in my cap. Business is rolling in at last, old fellow."

"About time," said Cass, in satisfied tones. "You'll ride in your carriage yet, Bob."

The Doctor laughed at this prophecy. It did not seem so impossible of realisation now as it had once been. Then he turned his attention to the stage, on which a stout lady in the shortest of skirts was favouring the audience with a song and interpolated dance of the orthodox pattern:—

"For I 'ave a little feller on the string,
(Dance)

And on me 'and he's put a little ring,
(Dance)

To the little chorch this little gal he'll
taike,
She'll kiss 'im for his own sweet saike,
And he'll love 'er as 'is little bit of
caise." (Dance)

"That is Polly Horley," said Cass, referring to the singer of this gem. "She is a great favourite here."

"I don't wonder," replied Ellis drearily; "the song is senseless enough to please even this brainless audience. Why must a music-hall ditty consist of bad English and worse grammar, delivered with a Cockney accent? Polly Horley! I know her! When I was house surgeon at St Jude's Hospital she was brought in with a broken leg. We were excellent friends."

"Or great pals, as Miss Horley would put it. Let us send round your card and ask for an interview."

"For what reason? I don't want to see that stout female."

"My dear fellow, Polly has been a star here since Schwartz opened the hall, and she, if anyone, will know about Moxton and Zirknitz."

"By Jove! that is true, Harry. You are a better detective than I am. Get that waiter there to take round our cards."

A small fee soon accomplished this, and the venal waiter vanished, shortly to reappear with the message that Miss Horley would be pleased to see Dr Ellis and friend in her dressing-room after the singing of her great patriotic song. Almost immediately afterwards she marched to the foot-lights in the costume of Britannia, and carrying the Union Jack.

Then followed the usual piece of Jingoism about "never shall be slaves, while the banner waves, earth is thick with British graves," etc., etc. The flag was duly waved at the end of each verse, and the audience, as in duty bound, joined in with imperial ardour. While Miss Horley treated the listeners to an extra verse bearing on the local situation, Ellis and Harry Cass were guided into the back regions of the stage by a smart page-boy. He led them through a wilderness of scenes, along dark passages, and past rooms thronged with ballet girls, ultimately ushering them into a small apartment, barely furnished and flooded with unshaded electric light. Here the visitors were accommodated with two chairs, and shortly Britannia, flag and all, made her noisy appearance. She literally threw herself on the doctor.

"I'm that glad to see you again, doc," cried Britannia, effusively. "Where have you been hiding all this time?" Then, without waiting for an answer, she turned to Harry: "You're a stranger, too, Mr Cass, but better late than never. I am glad to see you. You'll both have drinks, I s'pose?"

"No, thank you, Miss Horley. We just wish to congratulate you on your new song."

"Ah, it' knocks 'em, don't it?" said the fair Polly. "They never let me off without a triple encore. You are looking ill, doctor. It's that 'orrid murder, eh?"

"What murder?"

"Why, the Dukesfield murder, silly! I saw all about it in the

papers; your name was there, too, and I said: 'Here's my dear old pal Ellis, who mended my spar.'"

"Oh, you said that, did you?"

"Rather. It was queer that you should be the doctor to see after that poor chap. I call him poor chap because he is dead," explained Miss Horley, "but I never did like that Moxton. A miserly, insulting crab-stick."

"Oh, so you knew Moxton?"

"Of course I did. He came here nearly every night. What is more, he took his wife from here."

Ellis was painfully excited. "Mrs Moxton? Was she a musical hall singer?"

"Not she," replied Polly, disdainfully. "She hadn't the brains to sing. She typed for a living, I believe, but her sister was a programme-seller here."

"Janet Gordon?"

"Oh, you know her, Mr Cass, do you?"

"No, I don't, but I have heard of her."

"Then I'll bet you heard nothing but good of her," cried Miss Horley, warmly. "That girl is as square a woman as ever lived. If it hadn't been for her, goodness knows what would have become of that silly little Laura."

"I don't call Mrs Moxton silly," said the doctor, annoyed by this description.

"Oh, don't you, doctor, then I do. She was silly to marry that beast of a Moxton, the horrid little cad. It was against Janet's wish that she did so, and Janet was right. A nice mess she made of her life. He neglected her, and came here to make love to

me—me, a married woman with five of a family. But I slapped his face for him," said Polly, complacently, "that I did."

"Mrs Moxton met her husband here?"

"Yes. Janet let her come to the hall sometimes, and she met Moxton. Both girls are decent, doc, so don't say that I run 'em down. Janet is a girl in a thousand. She left us a week or two ago. I expect she has gone to live with her sister now. They will have old Moxton's money, I daresay."

"Who do you think killed Moxton?" asked Cass.

"My dear boy, ask me something easier," said Polly, applying the powder-puff to her nose. "I haven't the slightest idea. He was nasty enough to have any quantity of enemies."

"Do you know a man called Zirknitz, Miss Horley?"

Polly turned round with a smile. "Do I know the nose on my face?" she said lightly. "Of course I do. It is funny you should talk of him, for he is coming to see me in a few minutes. If you'll wait, I'll introduce him to you."

Ellis and Cass exchanged looks of congratulation at this good fortune, and the unsuspecting Polly, little thinking she was weaving a halter for a man's neck, babbled on. "He might have found out the truth if he'd only gone to Dukesfield on that night as he intended."

"Did he go there?" asked Ellis, eagerly.

"No. Janet was there on that night. She got leave from

Schwartz to see her sister. Zirknitz, who is a friend of Janet's, intended calling for her to take her home, but Moxton got drunk here, and Zirknitz didn't go lest there should be a row. So—come in." She broke off as there was a sharp knock. The door opened, and a handsome, light-haired young man appeared.

"Oh! here you are," cried Polly, jovially. "Doc, this is Mr Rudolph Zirknitz."

CHAPTER IX

THE AUSTRIAN

CASS and Ellis examined the new-comer swiftly as they returned his bow. It was a foreign bow, including a smart click of the heels. Zirknitz was tall, slim, and remarkably handsome, his good looks being set off to the fullest advantage by the quiet perfection of his evening dress. He wore no jewellery, the whitest of linen, the neatest of bows, and a silk hat with a wonderful lustre. As the night was chilly he had on a fur-lined coat with sable cuffs and collar, and his slender hands, encased in grey gloves, held a gold-topped bamboo. Altogether Mr, or Monsieur, or Herr Zirknitz was, to all appearances, a man who valued his looks as part of his stock-in-trade to enable him to carry on his business of adventurer. But, in spite of his care, the hoof betrayed the devil, for there was a rakish, fast air about him which stamped him as dangerous. Ellis thought

that such a scamp would not draw the line at murder, so long as he could save himself from punishment.

"I am charmed to meet your friends, madame," said Zirknitz, in good enough English, but with a pronounced foreign accent. "And the names?"

"This is Mr Cass; that gent is Dr Ellis."

The smile died away on the Austrian's lips. "Ellis!" he said, in a hesitating manner, "and a doctor—of Dukesfield?"

"Yes, M. Zirknitz," replied Ellis, grimly, "of Dukesfield."

"You saw the body of my poor friend Moxton?"

"Yes. Were you a friend of his?"

"The best friend he had, monsieur. If I knew who killed him so cruelly, I would spend my life trying to bring him to justice. *Helas!*"

"H'm!" repeated Cass. "So you think a man killed Moxton?"

"I go by the evidence at the inquest," said Zirknitz, with a bow. "The doctor explained at the inquest that a man must have struck the blow."

"I said that indeed, M. Zirknitz. But a woman may be mixed up in the matter."

"Here, all of you!" cried Polly, with impatient good-humour, "I can't have you three talking here all night. I want to dress and go home to my chicks. Rudolph, you must come and see me on another night. Mr Cass, doctor, look up yours truly whenever you get a chance, and good-night to you, my dears."

In this way the star hustled them out of her dressing-room, and the three men repaired to the front of the house. It seemed, indeed, that Zirknitz was inclined to leave them, but after a glance at the haggard face of Ellis he changed his mind. Cass invited him to sit at their table, which he did, and accepted a lemon-squash.

"I never take anything stronger," he said gracefully. "It is bad for the nerves; it makes the hand shake."

"I can understand that as applying to a doctor like myself, M. Zirknitz, but to you—how does it apply to you? What profession do you follow that requires nerve?"

"I play cards, doctor. I earn my living in that way; and, let me tell you, one who does so must have a steady hand, a clear brain, and nerves of steel."

As he spoke, Schwartz, all alone, strolled past. He nodded to the Austrian, but frowned slightly when he saw him with Ellis. Then pausing by the table, he tapped Cass on the shoulder with a plump, beringed hand.

"Mr Cass, mine goot frend, vill you with me gome? I haf pisness with you that gannot wait."

"Is there money in it, Schwartz?"

The German cast another look at Zirknitz, who was trifling with a cigarette which he took out of a handsome silver case. "I dink zo," he said pointedly.

"In that case I'll come. Wait for me here, Ellis. M. Zirknitz, I wish you good-evening," and Cass went off in high spirits with

the fat Schwartz, so that Ellis and the Austrian were left alone.

The table at which they were seated was placed at a comparatively secluded corner, out of the crush of people and the glare of the light. Yet, quiet though it was, Zirknitz, after a glance round, appeared to be annoyed by the position.

"Will you come to my box, monsieur?" he said, rising. "I fancy it is more comfortable there."

"But my friend Cass?"

"I shall instruct the waiter to bring him to the box when he returns here. Come, doctor," added Zirknitz, in a whisper, "I wish to speak with you—about the murder."

A thrill ran through Ellis as he followed the Austrian up the stairs. Was the man about to confess to his crime? That was hardly probable. Perhaps he intended to explain the cypher. Yet that, also, was doubtful. By this time Ellis had seated himself in a shady corner of the box. He was thoroughly puzzled, and could conceive of no reason why Zirknitz should seek this interview. The young man closed the door, removed his coat and hat, and offered Ellis a cigarette. The doctor refused on the plea that he had smoked enough, for he could not bring himself to accept anything from the hands of M. Zirknitz. They were those of a card-sharper, a swindler—a murderer! In this belief Ellis decided to let the Austrian do most of the talking, hoping to trap him—if not into confession at least into damaging admissions. His own

rôle was to say nothing—to know nothing and to give M. Zirknitz a sufficiency of rope to weave a halter. The situation was uncomfortable, and Ellis felt as though he were dealing with a graceful but dangerous tiger which required dexterous and diplomatic handling.

"I am glad to meet you, doctor," said Zirknitz, in his quiet voice. "Indeed, had I not done so here by chance I should have called on you."

"With reference to the murder?"

"Say with reference to Mrs Moxton and her husband's will. Also, monsieur, with reference to her husband's cousin. Ah, *scélérat!*"

"Busham?"

"Ah, yes, that is the name. Mr Richard Busham, the advocate."

"Do you know him?"

"*Moi, monsieur? Non!* but I hope to know him if he does not behave well to my sister."

Dr Ellis leant back in his chair with a gasp of astonishment. "Your sister!"

"Mrs Moxton, or, rather, I should say, my half sister. Did you not know? *Quel dommage!*"

"How should I know?" muttered Ellis, not yet recovered from his amazement.

"Because my sister, Mrs Moxton, told me that you were her best friend."

"I hope I am her friend. But I confess that I am astonished to hear that you are her brother. Are you not a foreigner?"

"Yes, to speak truly there is no blood relationship. Mrs Gordon, the mother of my sister, married

my father, Adolph Zirknitz, who was a widower. The marriage of our parents is the bond between us."

"I see. And you have two sisters?"

"*Oui!* Mrs Moxton, who is Laura, and Miss Janet Gordon. Who told you?"

"Polly—Miss Horley."

"Ah," muttered Zirknitz, with a look of displeasure, "she talks so much, oh, so very much."

Here was a discovery. The mythical lover of Mrs Moxton, the murderer of her husband, if the blood signs could be believed, turned out to be her brother by marriage. A queer sort of relationship truly, which Ellis had not met with before, still one sufficiently close to put any question of love out of the case. If so, what was Zirknitz's motive for committing the crime? Ellis felt that he was floundering in deep water.

"Why do you tell me all this?" he asked suspiciously.

"Because Laura says that you are her friend, and will help her through with this matter."

"Of the murder?"

"Partly, and of the will. Busham is not an easy man to deal with, and he is annoyed that old Moxton's money should go to Laura."

"How do you know it will go to her?"

"Laura told me she thought there was a will leaving it to her."

"M. Zirknitz," said Ellis, after a few moments of reflection, "will you answer a few questions?"

"Oh, yes, most certainly. I

have much confidence in you, Dr Ellis."

The other did not reciprocate this sentiment, but had sense enough to keep his doubts to himself. "You knew Moxton very well, I presume?"

"*Oui da!*" Zirknitz shrugged his shoulders; "but we were not friends. He was always drinking and quarrelling. I do not like such men."

"You disliked him?"

"No. I dislike no person. It is troublesome to do that."

"Did you visit him at Dukesfield?"

"I did not. He hated me, you understand. Sometimes at night I went to see my sister when all was quiet."

Ellis reflected that these visits must have been conducted with considerable secrecy, seeing that Mrs Basket was ignorant of them; but, to be sure, they took place after dark. "Were you at Myrtle Villa on the night of the murder?"

"No," answered Zirknitz, coolly and promptly. "I thought of going for my sister Janet, but I changed my mind. Moxton was drunk, so I fancied he might make trouble."

"Then you saw Moxton on that night?"

"Oh, most certainly! He was—he was—" Zirknitz hesitated.

"He was in the secret gambling-room of Schwartz," finished Ellis, guessing his thoughts.

The Austrian's face became as blank as a sheet of white paper. "But I do not understand," he said with a shrug.

"Oh, well, as you please," re-

turned the doctor, coolly. "I know nothing about the matter myself. To continue where we left off. Where did you see Moxton last on the night he was killed?"

"Oh, at the bar in there," Zirknitz was clever enough to take his cue; "he was drunk—not very bad—but noisy and troublesome. He drove away in a cab."

"Right down to Dukesfield?"

"That I do not know. I went home to bed myself."

This was a lie, as Ellis shrewdly guessed, but the Austrian carried it off with an air which showed that he was an adept at falsehood.

"When did you hear of the murder?"

"I saw it next day in the papers."

"Then why did you not go to Dukesfield to help Mrs Moxton?"

"Why should I?" said Zirknitz, with a charming smile. "Murder is not pleasant. I don't like such things. And I might have got into trouble. I do not mind saying, doctor, that mine has been a life of adventure, and I care not for the police."

"You are afraid," said Ellis, wondering at the selfishness and brutal candour of the confession.

"*Certainement!* I am afraid. Oh, think badly of me if you like. I am so bad that I can be no worse. But I shall help my sister over the money."

"Because you hope to get some?"

"Eh! why not? I am extravagant."

Ellis felt a strong desire to kick this handsome, smiling ras-

cal, but he doubted if even a kick would rouse any shame in him. The man seemed to have no moral sense; just such a soulless, brainless being who would commit a crime. The doctor began to look upon him as a psychological curiosity, and felt more convinced than ever that he had killed Moxton. The want of money supplied the motive.

"Who do you think murdered Moxton?" he asked, resolved to startle the man into a confession.

"Who do I think murdered Moxton," repeated Zirknitz, blandly. "Why, my dear monsieur, I think Mr Busham did."

Ellis jumped up. "On what grounds do you make such an accusation?"

"Ah, I will not tell you that now," replied Zirknitz, coolly. "I do not yet know you well. If Mrs Moxton agrees I may do so."

"But if you will—"

"Oh, no, I tell nothing. See, the performance is over. We must go."

While the Austrian was re-assuming coat and hat, Ellis felt sorely tempted to tell him about the blood signs and accuse him of killing Moxton. But as yet he had not sufficient evidence, and it was unwise to put Zirknitz on his guard until he could get him into a corner. Before he could decide, the Austrian nodded and, still smiling, slipped out of the box. Ellis stooped to pick up his stick and followed almost immediately, only to find that Zirknitz had vanished into the crowd. What his attitude was towards himself, the doctor could not quite determine. "I shall

question Mrs Moxton about her brother," he reflected, as he went in search of Cass.

The journalist was in the office of Schwartz, but came out when he heard Ellis inquiring for him.

"How did you get on with Zirknitz?" he asked, as they hailed a hansom.

"Oh, pretty well. He talked a great deal, and declared that Busham killed Moxton."

"The deuce! How can he prove that?"

"I don't know. He refused to give any proof, and cleared out before I could question him further. What did Schwartz want to see you about?"

"To warn you and me against cultivating Zirknitz."

"Is he a bad egg?"

"The worst in the nest, from all accounts. I believe he killed Moxton on his own hook."

"He denies that he was at Dukesfield on that night."

"Denies it? Like his brass. Why, he left this hall to take Moxton home."

"Who says so?"

"Schwartz."

"Do you believe Schwartz?"

Cass drew a long, long breath. "I don't know what to believe," he said. "All these men form part of the gang of rogues. There is more devilry in this case than we know of, Bob."

CHAPTER X

A STRANGE DENIAL

ON arriving at their lodgings, both men were too excited over the

case to feel inclined for sleep. Instead of going to bed, they made up the fire, lighted their pipes, and continued the discussion commenced in the hansom. It was then that Ellis repeated the statement of Zirknitz anent his connection with Mrs Moxton and her sister.

"So you see, Harry, the man is Mrs Moxton's brother, or half-brother—not her lover."

"He is really no relation at all," retorted Cass, rather amazed by what he heard. "Mrs Moxton's mother married the father of Zirknitz, did she? That makes the young man brother by marriage, but so far as parentage and blood go, he could marry Mrs Moxton to-morrow."

"I tell you the man isn't her lover."

"Possibly not, after what Zirknitz has told you—that is, if it is true. But he may be the murderer for all that."

"Oh, I agree with you there," said the doctor. "The creature is one of those selfish, soulless beings without moral feelings. So long as he could do so, without risking his neck, I quite believe he would go so far as murder. Then he is a spendthrift and a Sybarite; so to get this money it is just possible he killed Moxton. But if he is guilty, Mrs Moxton does not know of his wickedness."

"Then why did she faint when his name was mentioned?"

"Because no doubt she is aware of his dangerous nature, and perhaps may think him guilty. What I mean is that, up to the moment

I mentioned the name, she did not suspect Zirknitz."

"Humph!" said Cass, looking at the fire. "It might be so. What do you intend to do now? The situation is complicated."

"I will see Mrs Moxton and tell her that I have met Zirknitz."

"Will you tell her also that he accuses Busham?"

"Yes! because from what he said, Mrs Moxton may know the grounds upon which he bases his accusation."

"Then she must be inculpated in the crime," cried Cass, decisively.

"I don't see that," said Ellis, much annoyed. "Come what may, I believe that poor little woman is innocent."

"Because you are in love!"

"It may be so," assented the doctor, gloomily. "Love warps my mind, perhaps, but the whole case is so extraordinary and mysterious that it is difficult to say who is, and who is not, concerned in it."

"In my opinion the whole lot are concerned in it," said Cass, "and the desire for money is the cause of the crime. By the way, I asked Schwartz about the Gordon sisters."

"He knows both, I suppose?"

"Yes; but he praises only one—Janet Gordon. Mrs Moxton he appears to think very little of."

"That may be because he does not know her so well. Janet was in the employment of Schwartz as a programme-seller and attendant, but Mrs Moxton, being a type-writing girl, only occasionally visited the hall. In any case I

admit that the Gordon girls appear to be shady."

"Yet you think of marrying one."

"I shall not do so if I find out anything wrong," said Ellis. "It is true that I am in love with Mrs Moxton, but should her past be a bad one, I am sufficiently reasonable to crush down my feelings. Still, I believe that she is more sinned against than sinning; and it will be my task to solve the mystery of this murder—to prove that my belief is a true one."

"I am with you there, Bob, and I shall help you with all my heart. But I tell you plainly that Schwartz has no very good opinion of Mrs Moxton. He declares that she is frivolous, vain and foolish."

"She is none of the three, Harry, believe me. And Janet?"

"Janet is staunch, honest, clever and honourable. Schwartz respects her highly, and he is not the man to bestow praise unduly."

"I should like to see this girl," said Ellis, thoughtfully, "particularly as she may throw some light on the murder. From the description of old Ike, I believe the woman he drove to Pimlico was Janet Gordon. She must know something or she would not have been crying on that night, nor would she have given up her situation at the Merryman Music-Hall so suddenly."

"Perhaps you consider her guilty?"

"No. On the authority of those signs on the arm of the dead man, I believe Zirknitz killed him."

Ellis rose and stretched himself. "We have a terrible tangle to

unravel, Harry," he said after a pause.

"I don't see why we need trouble ourselves to do it, Bob."

"I do. Mrs Moxton must be proved guiltless."

Cass shook his head. "Even if she is innocent of the murder her past is shady," he said. "She is not the wife for you, Bob."

"When the crooked is made straight we shall see about that, Harry."

With this confident assertion Ellis retired to bed, but not to sleep. In spite of his love, he could not but see that Mrs Moxton's reputation was in peril. So much as he had gleaned of her past from herself and other sources was, to say the least of it, shady. The people with whom she had associated were scarcely reputable. Her husband had been a dissolute scoundrel, and Zirknitz, the so-called brother, was an idle vagabond, devoid of self-respect and morals. Then the sister! Schwartz praised her, but Schwartz was not overclean himself in character, and the employment of the girl at a second-rate music-hall was not the style of thing to recommend her to respectable people. Then, again, Mrs Moxton's conduct was shifty and underhand. She declined to tell the truth, yet from the surrounding circumstances it was plain that she knew it. Taking these things into consideration, many a man would have cut himself off root and branch from the widow; but some instinct told Ellis that she was not so evil as she appeared to be, and made him

anxious to sift the matter to the bottom. Therefore he got up in the morning still bent upon dealing with Mrs Moxton and her doubtful past. After all, she might prove in the end worthy of an honest man's love.

Shortly after breakfast Mrs Basket waddled in with the announcement that Mrs Moxton was at the door. Ellis was surprised. This was the first time she had come to his house since the terrible night of the murder, and their first meeting since her fainting at the name of Zirknitz. The doctor hailed this unexpected visit as a good omen. If she were guilty, she would scarcely take such a step; and it might be that, weary of fencing, she had come to confess the truth.

It was with Judas-like affability that Mrs Basket introduced the widow into the room. She believed in Mrs Moxton's guilt. She wished to see that guilt made clear, and desired that it should be punished. Yet she smiled and gabbled, and was ostentatiously friendly until dismissed by Ellis. Mrs Moxton breathed a sigh of relief as the door closed on the treacherous creature. She looked pale, but was as pretty as ever, and Ellis felt the charm of her manner sap the doubts he entertained of her honesty. At first he thought that she had come to explain about Zirknitz, but at the outset of the conversation Mrs Moxton did away with this idea. Her opening remark revealed the reason of her call.

"I have found it, doctor," she said, producing a legal-looking

blue envelope. "The will of Edgar is in this packet."

"Where was it hidden, Mrs Moxton?"

"You will never guess. Under the matting of the sitting-room. I expect he concealed it there in one of his magpie-fits when he was drunk, and forgot its whereabouts when he got sober. This is the will, doctor, and it leaves all his property, real and personal, to me."

"So you are a rich woman, Mrs Moxton," said Ellis, eyeing her gravely. "I congratulate you."

"Don't be in too great a hurry to do that," she rejoined coolly. "I have yet to reckon with Mr Brusham and his suspicions."

"You can disprove those, can you not?"

"I do not know; I cannot say. I must first learn what his suspicions are, and that will be easy enough. I have only to show Mr Brusham the will and he will come out with his accusation. Whether I can refute it remains to be seen; and it is for this reason that I wish you to visit the lawyer with me."

"Visit Mr Brusham?" said Ellis, considerably astonished at this unusual proof of confidence.

"But what can I do?"

"Two things. Firstly, you can be a witness to the charges, which, I feel certain, Mr Brusham will bring against me."

"Then you trust me so far as to let me hear those charges?"

"I do, because in the face of all circumstantial evidence to the contrary you believe that I am innocent. For that reason I re-

gard you as my friend, for that reason I ask you to stand by me in my time of trouble."

Ellis looked at her doubtfully, not knowing what to make of this speech, which, indeed, was puzzling enough. An honourable woman, entangled in the net of villains: a scheming adventuress, bent upon arriving at her own ends—Mrs Moxton was one or the other; and the love which Ellis had for her inclined him to believe she was honourable. Still, there must have been some shadow of doubt on his face, for Mrs Moxton became bitter and angry and unmeasured in speech.

"Am I mistaken in you?" she demanded sharply. "Have you repented of what you said to me the other day? Is it with you as with other men—words! words! words! If so, tell me, and I go—go never to trouble you or see you again. You must trust me in all or not at all."

The doctor was astonished at this sudden outburst, and hastened to assure Mrs Moxton that she did him an injustice. "I firmly believe in your innocence, and I feel certain that you can explain away the charges against you."

"They have yet to be made, doctor," replied the widow, cooling down. "And when they are I wish you to be present. That desire will show you whether I can answer them or not. Another reason why I desire you to visit Mr Brusham in my company is that I am anxious for you to protect me from his violence."

"Confound the fellow!" cried

Ellis, firing up. "Will he dare to lay hands on you?"

"Not on me, but on the will. If I defy Mr Busham, he is quite capable of taking the will from me by force and destroying it."

"We shall see about that," said Ellis, after a moment's thought. "However, I guess from what you say that Busham is a tricky, shifty scoundrel. Certainly I will come with you, Mrs Moxton. When are you going?"

"To-morrow morning. We can take the underground railway to Esher Lane."

"Very good. I will see you in the morning. In the meantime will you leave this will for me to look over?"

Ellis made this demand with the intention of seeing how far Mrs Moxton would trust him, as it was scarcely fair that the confidence should be all on one side. To his secret astonishment and openly-expressed pleasure, she agreed at once to the request.

"As you trust me, I shall you," said Mrs Moxton. "Keep the will by all means till to-morrow morning; but take care of it, as it is an original document."

"I will put it away now;" and Ellis locked the document up in a despatch-box which stood near his desk. "And I thank you for this proof of confidence, Mrs Moxton; you will not find it misplaced."

"I am quite sure of that, doctor. I trust you thoroughly."

"In some ways, yes, in others, no. For instance, why will you not tell me about Zirknitz?"

Mrs Moxton turned pale. "I cannot tell you about him—yet."

Ellis was vexed. "Well, there is no need," said he, a trifle crossly. "I know about this man."

"About Rudolph? About——"

"Yes, about your brother by marriage."

The widow, who in her excitement had half risen from her chair, fell back into it again thunderstruck. "Where did you meet him?" she stammered.

"At the Merryman Music-Hall."

"Do you know that place?" shrieked Mrs Moxton, much agitated.

"I was there last night. There I met Zirknitz, and he told me of his relationship to you. Also," and here Ellis grew grave, "he informed me who murdered your husband."

Mrs Moxton's capacity for amazement was exhausted by these repeated shocks, and she sat limply in her chair. The last remark, however, seemed to brace her up for the moment.

"And who does he say killed Edgar?" she asked, with an anxiety she strove vainly to conceal.

"None other than Busham, the man who——"

Mrs Moxton interrupted him with a burst of hysterical laughter. "Dr Ellis," said she, in a choking voice, "I know that is false. Mr Busham did not kill my husband."

CHAPTER XI

A HALF CONFESSION

MRS MOXTON made the statement regarding Busham's inno-

cence with so much decision that Ellis looked at her in surprise. It was strange that she should defend a man she disliked. "How is it that you think him guiltless?" he asked anxiously.

"Because he is a coward, and too timid to kill a man."

"Your husband was stabbed in the back in the darkness. That looks like a coward's deed."

"All the same, I feel sure he is innocent," persisted the widow. "I can see no reason for his killing Edgar. He knew that old Moxton made another will shortly before dying, and that he would not inherit. No! look at it which way you will, Mr Busham is not the murderer. I detest the man, but I must be just to him. What else did Rudolph tell you, or, rather, on what ground does he accuse Mr Busham."

"He refused to tell me the grounds without your permission."

"My permission! Why, I know nothing about the matter."

"From what Zirknitz hinted it would appear that you do," said Ellis, a trifle drily.

"Then he shall tell his story in your presence," rejoined Mrs Moxton, quickly, "and you will see that I know nothing."

"I shall be glad to be convinced. Tell me, why did you keep silent about this young man?"

"Because of the blood marks on the arm of Edgar."

"Oh, so you knew the secret of the cryptographic signs, in spite of your denial?"

"I did! I do! As a matter of fact, I taught that cryptogram to my—" here Mrs Moxton closed

her mouth with the nervous gesture of one who thinks she is saying too much.

"To your sister," finished Ellis, quietly.

Mrs Moxton fenced. "How do you know that I have a sister?"

"From the books in your house, some of which contain your name and that of your sister Janet. Also from a cabman on the rank here, who described to me a woman so like you that I am convinced she is your sister—possibly, from the exact likeness, your twin sister."

The widow became the colour of chalk at these words. "Where did the cabman see her?"

"He drove her to Pimlico on the night, and about the time, your husband was murdered."

For a moment or so Mrs Moxton looked doubtfully at Ellis, and passed her tongue over her dry lips. The doctor could see that she trembled. His unexpected knowledge evidently inflicted a shock on her nerves. Yet, for all her emotion, she still strove to baffle his curiosity. "You seem to know a good deal about my husband," she said irritably.

"I do. Because I am anxious to clear your name and extricate you from a difficult position. Mrs Moxton"—Ellis rose and bent over her with great earnestness—"why will you not be frank with me? You tell me much, but you will not tell me all."

She moaned and moved away from him. "Heaven help me, I dare not tell you all."

"Yet I am your best friend."

"I know it, but you would shrink from me did you know the truth."

Ellis took her hand gently. "Tell me who murdered your husband?" he whispered urgently.

"I don't know! I swear I don't know!" cried the widow, with much vehemence; "if I did I would tell."

"The blood marks hint at Zirknitz."

"Yes, yes, but I am sure he is innocent. Rudolph is foolish, vain, shallow, but he never killed Edgar, I swear."

"Yet the name on the dead man's arm?"

"I don't know the reason of that; I can't say why Edgar wrote it. I read it myself, although I denied all knowledge to you. It was for Rudolph's sake that I lied. I was afraid lest he should get into trouble. I asked him if he was in Dukesfield on that night, but he denies that he was."

"And your sister Janet?"

A tremor passed through the frame of Mrs Moxton. "She came to see me on that night, and we quarrelled; she left before Edgar came back, and, I suppose, went crying down the road to take a cab home."

"Did she see the murder committed?" asked Ellis, tentatively.

"I don't know," said Mrs Moxton, under her breath. "I am—oh," she burst out, "I can't tell you more. I have had to do with villains and rogues all my life, and I am paying the penalty of their sins, not of my own. I have tried

to be a good woman, so do not shrink from me. I swear that I do not know who killed Edgar. Some day I may tell you more, but at present I cannot—I cannot."

She hastily let down her veil and stood up to go. "You trust me still? you believe in me yet?" she said entreatingly, and with tears.

"I do," replied Ellis, touched by her emotion. "You puzzle me more than I can say, yet I am sure you are innocent of all evil. But if you would only tell me —"

"Some day! some day!" she interrupted hastily; "but not now. Yet what you should know, you shall know. Come to me between four and five to-day, and you will meet Rudolph. He shall confess what he means by hinting at my knowledge of Mr Busham's guilt."

"I will come with pleasure, but do you think Zirknitz will come?"

"Yes. I will telegraph for him now. He loves me and trusts me, and I have great power over his weak nature. In my hands he is like wax, and if the truth is in him you shall hear it this afternoon. But I know that Rudolph is innocent. I am certain that Mr Busham did not strike the blow. Heaven alone knows the secret of Edgar's death. Good-bye, good-bye, Dr Ellis, and do not think badly of me. Indeed, indeed, when the moment comes I can put myself right in your eyes. What other people say or think, I do not care, but you must be shown that I am more sinned against than sinning. Good-

bye!" She stretched out her hand, and withdrew it abruptly ere he could touch the tips of her fingers. "Not yet, not yet," she muttered, and swiftly glided from the room before Ellis could recover from his surprise.

This woman was more inexplicable than ever. Apparently she knew a great deal, as could be seen by the information which Ellis had dragged out of her. Yet she refused to be candid, although at the same time she admitted that she wished to preserve her friend's good opinion. The hints dropped in her last hasty speech showed Ellis that he was right in trusting to his instinct concerning her nature. Whatever Mrs Moxton might be,—mysterious, shady, dangerous,—she had a straightforward, honest mind. It was warped by the circumstances in which she found herself placed through no fault of her own, and she was forced to fence and lie, and act a tricky part for some strong reason which she refused to impart to Ellis. Privately he thought that all her energies were bent upon shielding her sister, as formerly she had striven to shield Zirknitz by denying all knowledge of the cryptogram. Could Janet Gordon be the guilty person? Ellis twice or thrice asked himself this question, but could find no answer to it. Her hasty flight on the night of the murder, her tears, her silence, her absence from the music-hall hinted—if not at personal guilt—at least at guilty knowledge. If she did not kill Moxton herself,—and on the face of it she could have had

no reason to do so,—she must have seen the crime committed. Perhaps she had met with the assassin face to face, and had fled horror-struck and weeping to the cab-stand. The way to learn the truth would be to see her. No doubt she had confessed the cause of her terror to Mrs Moxton, and it was this secret which Mrs Moxton, loyally doing violence to her nature, wished to conceal. But if the widow would not speak, Ellis made up his mind that Janet Gordon should; therefore he resolved to find out the number of her lodging in Geneva Square, and call upon her. Failing Mrs Moxton, Zirknitz might supply the information. In her own despite Mrs Moxton must be rescued from the dangers which appeared to surround her. She had confessed with less than her usual caution that she was paying for the sins of others, and Ellis was bent upon bringing the truth to light and making the actual sinners suffer for their own wickedness. The fact that he was more deeply in love than ever, greatly assisted him in arriving at this conclusion. Yet a wise man, a worldly man, would have called him a fool to still love and trust Mrs Moxton in the face of all he knew about her. But in this instance instinct was stronger than argument, and Ellis was satisfied that the woman he loved would yet emerge vindicated and spotless from the dark cloud of troubles which obscured her true nature.

Precisely at half-past four he presented himself at Myrtle Villa. The door was opened by Mrs

Moxton herself. Apparently she had been watching for his arrival, and Ellis, guessing as much, felt his heart swell with joy. Strange that his love at this moment should move him to emotion.

"Rudolph is here," whispered the widow. "Let *me* question him. I know how to make him speak out."

Ellis nodded, and when ushered into the sitting-room was sufficiently composed to meet Zirknitz with a smile. The Austrian looked an Adonis in the day-time, and was admirably dressed in a smart frock-coat, fawn-coloured trousers, and patent leather boots of high polish. He was a modern D'Orsay in looks and dress—just the handsome kind of scamp to attract silly women. Ellis had no doubt that one day or another Monsieur Rudolph would pick up an heiress, and become respectable. The young man was shallow and selfish, yet—if one could judge by his smiling face—harmless enough in other ways.

"I am delighted to see you, doctor," said the Austrian, blandly. "You must forgive me for leaving you so abruptly the other night. But you were beginning to ask me indiscreet questions, so I—vanished."

"Rudolph always considers himself first," observed Mrs Moxton, who was making tea. "He is the most selfish creature in existence."

"The most selfish!" assented Zirknitz. "I think of no one by myself. Why should I? *Quelle bêtise.*"

"Every man should think of

others!" said Ellis, hardly knowing what to say in the face of this cool confession.

"Oh, *mon cher* monsieur, that doctrine is out of date. Thank you, Laura. I will have some tea. Three sugar bits, my dear. I love sweets, and sunshine, and pretty girls—as a butterfly should."

Mrs Moxton looked at the pretty youth with something of contempt. "You need not blazon forth your follies, Rudolph. I know what you are; and Dr Ellis will soon find you out. What is this story you have been telling him about me?"

"Story? None! What is it, monsieur? *Point de moquerie!*"

"You accuse Busham of this murder!"

"Ah, yes, now I remember; and I refused to tell you my reasons until permitted by my sister. Have I your consent, *ma chère* Laura?"

"Tell everything you know," cried Mrs Moxton, with a frown. "Why you should bring my name into the matter I don't know. There is no need for you to explain, Rudolph; you will only romance. Why do you suspect Busham?"

Zirknitz looked at Ellis. "Can I speak freely?" he asked doubtfully.

"Certainly. The doctor is my best friend."

"Ah! so charming to have a best friend. Hear, then, monsieur, and you, my dear Laura. When I was at Dukesfield on the night Edgar was killed—"

"Why," said Ellis, with something of anger in his tones, "you

told me you were not at Dukesfield on that night."

Zirknitz shrugged his handsome shoulders. "I told a lie! Oh, yes, I always tell a lie when necessary. I did not know Laura wished me to speak, so I told what was not true. What would you, monsieur? Your questions were indiscreet. My answers were false. *Voila!*!"

"Never mind excusing yourself, Rudolph. What about Mr Busham?"

"Eh, my dear sister, I believe he killed our poor Moxton! Why not? I saw the excellent Busham in Dukesfield on the night of the death."

CHAPTER XII

MR BUSHAM, SOLICITOR

LOUNGING in his chair, Zirknitz made this astonishing statement as though it were the most natural thing in the world. Mrs Moxton looked at Ellis in surprise, and both looked at Rudolph.

"Is this true?" asked Ellis, doubtfully.

"Eh, *mon cher*, most assuredly. I tell lies only when necessary."

"Rudolph, you must explain how it was you came to be in Dukesfield on that night."

"My dear sister, did I not say I would come for Janet?"

"Yes, and you never kept your promise."

"No," chimed in Ellis. "Polly Horley said the same thing."

Rudolph smiled in a most engaging manner.

"Ah, that excellent Horley! How much she knows of what she knows not. My sister, have I your permission to smoke?"

Mrs Moxton impatiently nodded an assent. "But I am waiting to hear how you did not come for Janet and yet were in Dukesfield on that night."

With great deliberation, Zirknitz selected a cigarette from his silver case and lighted it before making any reply. Selfish in his every act, he offered none to Ellis—an omission which troubled that gentleman very little. He had no great love for this egotistical butterfly.

"My Laura," said Rudolph, blowing a whiff of smoke, "on that night I was playing cards in the *salon* of the music-hall, and I won twenty pounds from Edgar. He had not the money, but he gave me an 'I O U.' Then, most furious at his loss, he drank and drank till he was as a wild beast. I was going for Janet, and at the station I saw our Edgar; but to avoid him I went in another carriage. At the station of Dukesfield, I tried to run from him; but he saw me and followed; *quelle bêtise*. There was trouble, and he wished to fight. So when he went home I saw it was foolish to come for Janet, as Edgar would be raging. I took back another train, and a cab to my rooms in Bloomsbury. *Voila*, the story!"

"Not all the story!" said Ellis. "You have left out the most important part—about Busham."

"Ah, that dear Busham. When Edgar was angry with me on the platform of the Dukesfield Station

I see out of my eye's corner that clever advocate. He was watching our dear Edgar, but did not come near him. I knew him. Oh, yes, I knew his face very well."

"I did not know you were acquainted with him, Rudolph!"

"Best of sisters, I do not tell you all I know, or do. Our Edgar one day took me to see the excellent Busham in his office, where they did fight. Oh, I tell you, monsieur, the good Busham sent us away with a flea in our ears. Edgar spoke of his father, and said that Busham was a rogue wanting the money; so we had trouble, and we left very enraged. So I met Busham, the pig," finished Zirknitz, smiling, "and I do not forget his face."

"He was watching Edgar on the night of his death?"

"*Oui da!*! He thought I saw him not, but I did see him. *Ma foi*, I have quick eyes, Laura, as you well know. He ran out of the station after Edgar, and I am certain followed to kill him."

"About what time was this?"

"On eleven. I did hear the clock of the station strike when I was enraged with Edgar."

"And Moxton was drunk?" inquired Ellis, anxiously.

"He was straight-drunk, for he could walk; and cross-drunk, assuredly, since he wished to fight with me. But I care not for boxing," said Mr Zirknitz, gracefully. "And I go home to bed before twelve of the clock, like a good little boy. Aha, monsieur, you think I kill Edgar, do you not? *Eh bien!* You

demand of my landlady if I was not in my bed before twelve of the clock. I did not kill our poor Edgar. Why should I when he owes me twenty pounds? *Cher Ellis*, you are in the wrong box."

"You had better wait until I accuse you before excusing yourself," said Ellis, drily. "But even with this story of Busham having been at Dukesfield, I do not see how you can be certain of his guilt."

"Eh? To me it appears clear. This clever Busham wanted the money of his uncle, and murdered Edgar to get it."

"But, Rudolph, at that time Mr Busham knew that a second will had been made."

"Most certainly, *chère* Laura. If no second will had been made, this excellent Busham would not have killed Edgar."

"We can say nothing for certain until we see Busham," said Ellis, after a pause, "but there is one thing probable, Mrs Moxton. If Busham accuses you in any way we can turn the tables on him."

"You call on Busham, Laura."

"To-morrow. I must see about the will."

"And the money," smiled Rudolph. "Eh, *ma sœur*, forget not the most important thing."

"To you, perhaps, not to me," replied Mrs Moxton, with contempt. "My object is to get free of all this trouble."

"Of course. I will help you; eh, most certainly. But ask me not to meet the police. I do not like the police. For if——"

"Monsieur Zirknitz," said Ellis, cutting short this speech, "how

came it that your name was indicated on the dead man's arm?"

The Austrian was in nowise discomposed by this remark. "Ah, Laura spoke to me of that. I do not know; I cannot say. But I think, ah, *ma foi*, I think."

"What do you think, Rudolph?"

"My sister, I quarrelled with your good husband at the Dukesfield Station, and he went away enraged with me. When Busham struck him in the back——"

"You can't be sure of that," interrupted Ellis, impatiently.

"Eh, but I am sure," insisted Zirknitz, politely; "and Edgar, not seeing who stabbed him so cruelly, thought that I did so. Then he wrote on his arm to tell Laura."

"But why in cryptographic signs?"

"That I cannot say. The sign of a lizard was always the good Edgar's little jest on me. For my name is that of a town in my country where there are many lizards. Edgar found it in a book and always jested. Very little jests pleased the good Moxton. But now I must go," said Zirknitz, rising. "I have told you all you wish. My sister, do you desire me to speak more? No! My good doctor, have you a policeman without for my arrest? No! Ah, then I will take my leave. Not *adieu*, dear friends, but *au revoir*."

When Zirknitz sauntered out of the room, Mrs Moxton looked after him with a singular expression. "What do you think of him?" she asked.

"He is clever. It is a great

pity he does not put his talents to better use."

"Oh," Mrs Moxton shrugged her shoulders, "I don't ask you about his character. I know about that well enough. But do you think he is speaking the truth?"

"Yes. He has no reason to tell a lie. I daresay he did see Busham."

"And do you think Mr Busham is guilty?"

"I can't say. We have not sufficient evidence to go upon."

Mrs Moxton turned the conversation abruptly. "Did you read the will?"

"Yes. I see that all the money is left to you. I will give you back the document to-morrow. What time do you wish me to call?"

"About eleven o'clock. I have written to Mr Busham making an appointment for mid-day. I am glad you are coming with me," said the widow, sighing; "it will be a difficult interview."

"That remains to be seen. At anyrate, we are not so defenceless as we were before. If Busham accuses you—although I don't see on what grounds he can do so—we can denounce him on the evidence of Zirknitz."

"He will deny that he was at Dukesfield."

"Zirknitz can swear to his presence."

"No doubt, but will Rudolph do so? He is so afraid of the police."

Ellis reflected for a moment. "You are not so candid with me as you might be, Mrs Moxton,"

said he, seriously, "therefore you render my task the more difficult. But answer me truly now. Has Zirknitz ever done anything for which he is wanted by the police?"

"Not to my knowledge," replied the widow, frankly, "but he is such a coward, and his life is so open to danger, that the very name of the law terrifies him beyond expression. It is for this reason that I am certain of his innocence, and for the same reason I shielded him by feigning ignorance of the cryptogram. But we can talk of these things later. I am tired now."

In this abrupt way she dismissed Ellis, and he left the house sorely puzzled, his constant state of mind in reference to Mrs Moxton. If he did marry her he would marry the sphinx. That was clear enough.

Mr. Richard Busham inhabited a dingy set of offices in Esher Lane, adjacent to the Temple. His staff of clerks consisted of two under-fed, overworked creatures, who scribbled in an outer room for dear life at a miserable wage. The inner room, which had two dusty windows looking on to Bosworth Gardens, was occupied by their employer. This apartment was piled all round the walls with black tin boxes with the names of various clients painted on them in white. A brass-wired bookcase contained a few calf-bound volumes of legal lore; there was a large table covered with green baize, two chairs, and — nothing else. A more dreary or barren room can scarcely be conceived, but Mr

Busham being a miser, it suited him well enough. He called himself a lawyer, but he was really a usurer, and gained a handsome income by squeezing extortionate interest out of the needy. If the walls of Busham's private apartment could have spoken they would have protested frequently against the sights they were compelled to witness. The Holy Inquisition tortured people less than did this rat of a lawyer. He ground down his victims to the lowest, he lured them into his spider-web, and rejected them only when he had sucked them dry. His law was a farce, his money-lending a tragedy.

The man himself resembled in looks Fraisier, the rascally lawyer so admirably drawn by Balzac in "*Le Cousin Pons*." Like Fraisier, Busham was small, sickly-looking and pimpled; his expression was equally as sinister, and his heart as hard—that is if he had a heart, which his clients were inclined to doubt. He scraped and screwed, and swindled, and pinched to collect all the money he could; yet what benefit he thought he would gain from this hoarding it is impossible to say. He never spent it, he lived like a hermit, like a beggar, and gratified his sordid pride with the knowledge that he was becoming a wealthy man. And when he arrived at wealth? What then? Busham never gave this consideration a thought, perhaps because he fancied he would never become as wealthy as he wished to be. Altogether the man was an unwholesome, evil creature, who should,

for the good of humanity, have been in gaol. But he was clever enough to keep on the right side of the law he so misinterpreted.

At mid-day Mrs Moxton and Ellis presented themselves before this engaging being, and looked round the frowsy office with disgust. Another chair had to be brought in from the outer room for the accommodation of the doctor, and when his visitors were seated, Busham welcomed them with a nervous titter, which showed that he was not quite easy in his mind regarding the interview. Indirectly he resented the presence of Ellis.

"Well, Mrs Moxton," said he in a whistling whisper, his usual voice, "is there a will?"

The widow produced the blue envelope and laid it on the table. "There it is," she said, "it leaves all the property to me."

Busham went green and gasped, "All the property to you!" He snatched up the will and hastily read it over. "I see it does," was his answer; then after a pause he cast an evil look on Mrs Moxton, and opened a drawer of his desk. Evidently he was about to bring forward his accusation.

"Since you have shown me the will, I have something equally interesting to show you," said he, quietly. "What do you think of this, Mrs Moxton?" And on the table he laid a bone-handled carving-knife, on the blade of which were dull, dark stains of blood.

CHAPTER XIII

MRS MOXTON'S SURRENDER

THE widow turned pale when she saw the knife, and, unable to speak, looked at Ellis. The doctor understood that pleading glance and at once threw himself into the breach. "Where did you get this?" he asked Busham, sharply.

The lawyer, scenting an enemy, looked mistrustfully at the speaker out of his rat's eyes. "Your pardon, sir, who are you?" he demanded, with a kind of snarl in his voice.

"I am Dr Ellis, who examined the body of Moxton. I am also the friend of Mrs Moxton, and I came here to assist in this interview."

"And suppose I refuse to allow you to assist?"

"In that case, I shall know how to account for your possession of that knife."

Busham gave a kind of screech, and threw himself half-way across the table, shaking with anger. "You dare to insinuate that I killed my cousin?" he asked, in a whisper.

"Why not; you were with your cousin on that night."

"It is a lie!"

"It is the truth!" cried Mrs Moxton, finding her voice. "Rudolph saw you following Edgar from the station."

"And who is Rudolph?"

"Monsieur Zirknitz, my brother."

"Another of your shady gang. I dare you to——"

"Speak more civilly," interrupted Ellis, starting up, "or I shall twist that lean neck of yours."

At once the innate cowardice of Busham became apparent. Shaking and white, he dropped back into his chair, terrified at the doctor's angry look and menace. Yet, withal, he could not curb his venomous tongue.

"Violence," he gasped. "You do well, Mrs Moxton, to bring your bully here."

"What! You will have it?" cried Ellis, angrily.

Busham flung himself out of his chair, and shot up one of the dirty windows. "Another step and I call the police," he whispered.

"Do so, and I shall give you in charge."

"Me in charge, and for what?"

"For killing Moxton. You were with him shortly before his death."

With a scared look Busham drew down the window and returned to his desk. "I am safe from your violence I hope?" he said, looking apprehensively at Ellis.

"So long as you are civil to Mrs Moxton I won't touch you," replied the doctor, coolly, and in his turn sat down.

"He! he!" laughed Busham, nervously rubbing his hands, "it will be as well to conduct this interview quietly."

"I think so," observed Mrs Moxton, with an expressive glance at the knife, "for your own sake."

"Say rather for yours, Mrs Moxton."

"What do you mean?"

"He! he! that will take some

time to explain. If you would rather be alone with me——"

"Alone with you," repeated the widow, in tones of disgust. "I would rather be alone with a serpent. Dr Ellis shall stay—at my particular request."

"Dr Ellis has no intention of leaving," remarked that gentleman, and folding his arms relapsed into a grim but observant silence.

Busham, with a vexed air, scratched his chin with one lean finger. "As you please," said he, with apparent carelessness, "but he will not think much of you when I tell all."

"You know nothing about that," retorted Mrs Moxton, very pale, but in a steady voice, "and I have come here to learn all. Of what do you accuse me?"

"All in good time, dear lady," said Busham, harshly. "This knife was found by me in your garden, on the morning I called to see you after the murder."

"Are you sure you did not find it there on the previous night?" asked the widow, sneering.

"I was not in the garden on that night."

"Neither was the assassin," interposed Ellis, quickly. "Moxton was stabbed as he stepped in at the gate."

"Or as he turned to close it," retorted Busham, smartly.

Mrs Moxton held her handkerchief to her mouth and shivered, but with her eyes on Busham's mean face nodded to him to continue. The man, seeing that she had a vague terror of his threats, did so with a chuckle. "Since

you know that I was at Dukesfield on that night," he went on, "I admit it. Why should I not? I am innocent and can prove as much. So Monsieur Zirknitz saw me? H'm! I know that scamp; no one better. He called here one day with my cousin to extort money on the plea that I had undue influence over my uncle, but I soon turned the rascals out, I can tell you. I am a dangerous man when roused." Mr Busham chuckled, and repeated the phrase with relish. "A dangerous man."

"Oh, I daresay," said Mrs Moxton, with a contemptuous air, which accorded ill with her pale face and uneasy manner. "Dangerous as a fox, or a stoat, or a weasel may be. You belong to the vermin tribe, you do."

"Go on with your story, man," directed Ellis, curtly.

"Civil, civil, oh, very civil," snapped Busham, "but I'll teach you both manners before I'm done with you. At Dukesfield was I? Yes, I was. He! he! do you know what I saw there, Mrs Moxton? You don't. Well then, I'll tell you, and take this for my fee."

"The will!" gasped Mrs Moxton, as Busham clawed the document. "I thought that was what you wanted."

"Leave that will alone," growled Ellis, scowling.

Mr Busham immediately pushed the paper away. "It will come back to me soon," said he, nodding. "Oh, I know, I know."

"What the deuce do you know? Speak out, can't you?"

"Softly, Dr Ellis, softly, all in good time. Maybe you won't be

so pleased with my knowledge when you are possessed of it."

"I am the best judge of that; go on. You were at Dukesfield on the night of August 16th?"

"Yes, I was," cried Busham, with sudden energy. "I received intelligence of my uncle's death, and knowing that a new will had been made, that Edgar was the heir, I wished to inform him of the good news. From that scamp, Zirknitz, I learnt that Edgar went night after night to the Merryman Music-Hall in Soho, so I sought out that place in the hope of seeing him. I did see him," sneered Busham, "and, as usual, he was drunk—not in a fit state to talk business. When he left the hall to go home I followed his cab in another, thinking that the fresh air would sober him. But at Charing Cross underground station he had two more drinks, and, more intoxicated than ever, stumbled into a carriage. I went into another, thinking it best to see him home lest he might come to harm."

"You were very solicitous for the safety of one who had robbed you of a fortune," said Ellis, with a cynical look.

"That's just it," cried Busham, slapping the table with the open palm of his hand, "he was to get the money, and I wished to gain his good will, and take what pickings I could. Half a loaf is better than none, isn't it? If Edgar had lived I would have got the money—somehow. Even you, Mrs Moxton, would not have prevented that."

"Even I," repeated the widow,

bitterly. "Heaven help me, I would have been the last person to prevent your robbery. I never had any influence over Edgar. Go on, Mr Busham. Did you succeed in ingratiating yourself with my husband by announcing the good news of his father's death?"

"No, I didn't," snarled the lawyer. "I saw him quarrel with Zirknitz on the platform of the Dukesfield station, and then I watched him leave."

"Not only watched him, but followed him," said Ellis.

"Yes, I wanted to see how he would get home. I tried to speak to him, but being drunk he swore at me, and struck out with his cane. Seeing that there was no good to be got out of him in his then state, and that it would be useless to tell him the news, I resolved to defer the appointment until the morning, when I hoped to find him sober and repentant. He went away. I did not follow, but remained for some time talking to a policeman. Then I missed my train, and as I had to get home made up my mind to take a cab."

"An unusual expense for you," jeered Mrs Moxton.

"Oh, I wouldn't have taken the cab if I could have walked," said Busham, naively, "but I was not strong enough to do so. All the cabs at the station had carried away the theatre people, and I went down the road to the cab-rank in the middle of Dukesfield. There was one cab there. But just as I turned the corner a woman came running down the

road and jumped into it. She was crying, and trembling and wringing her hands. I saw her face in the light. It was you, Mrs Moxton."

"One moment," said the widow, as Ellis was about to contradict this preposterous statement. "I never saw you until after the death of my husband, and you never saw me. How, then, did you recognise me?"

"Oh, that was easy. Edgar gave me your picture."

"I should not have thought that Edgar was sufficiently friendly with you to do that."

"He was when I lent him money," said Busham, quietly.

"Why did you lend him money?"

"Because several times he called on me and threatened to see his father. I did not want him to do that lest he should be forgiven, so I lent him money on condition that he did not go. Uncertain of what his reception would be, he took my bribe and stayed away. On one of those occasions he showed me your photograph, Mrs Moxton."

"Edgar was forgiven after all," said the widow, ignoring this last remark.

"Yes, but the forgiveness did not do him much good. He! he!"

"Mr Busham!" burst out Ellis, who could no longer be restrained, "you did not see Mrs Moxton enter a cab on that night. The lady was her sister."

"I know about the sister," said Busham. "The twin-sister. Zirknitz told me."

"Are you friendly with Zirk-

nitz?" asked Ellis, with unconcealed surprise.

"Very!" retorted the lawyer, with an ugly grin. "I lend him money."

"Lend money to a scamp like that, whom you hate, who will never repay you?"

Busham scratched his chin. "Oh, as to that," said he, "I know what I am about, you may be sure. So it was your sister, Mrs Moxton? Bless me, how like she is to you; a twin, of course? I see. Why was she crying and flying?"

"She may have cried because we quarrelled on that night," said the widow, in an agitated tone; "but she was not flying. She merely went home."

"To thirty-two Geneva Square, Pimlico? I know! I know!"

"How do you know?"

"Because I picked up another cab and followed her!"

"Why did you do that?"

"I thought she was you, and wished to know where you were going at that hour of the night. Your sister going home? Ah, that explains it."

"So far, so good, Mr Busham," said Ellis, weary of this talk; "but what about the knife?"

"I called next morning at Myrtle Villa, after hearing of the murder. I searched the garden for traces of the criminal, and found that knife hidden behind some laurel-bushes."

"It was not hidden," cried Mrs Moxton. "It was thrown there by Edgar."

"Ah! you acknowledge that the knife is your property," said Busham.

"Why should I deny it? That knife is ours. It was tossed into the garden by Edgar."

"And this is rust on it, no doubt," said the lawyer, touching the stains. "Not blood, then, Mrs Moxton?"

The widow rose with an agitated face, and, snatching up the will, thrust it into Busham's hand. "Take it, and say no more," she said harshly.

"Mrs Moxton! The will!" cried Ellis, jumping up.

"Let him destroy it! Let him take and keep the money!"

"Thank you; and in return I will hold my tongue. If you like you can take the knife," said Busham.

Mrs Moxton picked it up, thrust it into the pocket of her cloak, and, without a glance at the amazed doctor, left the room. As she did so Busham stepped across to the grate in which a starved fire was burning and deliberately placed the will on the coals. Before Ellis could prevent it, the document was ablaze, and shortly nothing remained but black tinder.

"Now," snapped Busham, pointing to the door, "you can follow her."

CHAPTER XIV

THE PIMLICO HOUSE

HAVING seen Busham commit a felony by burning the will, Ellis left the office. He did not even protest against the destruction of the document, since it was none of his business to do so. Mrs Moxton, who benefited under the

will, had not only handed it over to her enemy, but had advised him to destroy it. She had exchanged it, so to speak, for the knife with which Moxton had been killed, and, in addition, had secured the lawyer's silence by yielding up her property. Silence about what? That was the question Ellis asked himself, and which he put to Cass when reporting the extraordinary scene which had taken place in the Esher Lane office.

"I think I can guess what Busham hinted at," said the reporter. "He accuses Janet Gordon of the crime?"

"Why should he? She had no motive to kill Moxton, so far as I can see."

"Precisely, so far as you can see, Bob. Depend upon it, Busham is certain that Janet Gordon is guilty, and Mrs Moxton knows that such is the case, else she would not give up her property so freely."

"You mean that she allowed the will to be destroyed so that Busham should not accuse her sister?"

"Yes. All along I said that Mrs Moxton was shielding some person; now we know who the person is."

"It might be so," said Ellis, reflectively. "Janet Gordon may have rushed out of the house with that knife and have killed Moxton, and afterwards she may have ran weeping to take a cab from so perilous a place. But why did she stab the man? Why? Why?" and Ellis, according to custom, began to pace the room.

"Ah," said Cass, who was resting

on the sofa, "you must ask Mrs Moxton for a reply to that question."

"She won't reply to it. For some reason which I cannot fathom she persistently keeps me in the dark."

"H'm!" mused the journalist. "A dangerous, secretive woman! Don't get your back up, Bob, I am not calling her names. But you must admit that she is secretive, and secretive people are always very dangerous to those of a more open disposition. But how did Mrs Moxton excuse herself for letting Busham burn the will?"

"I don't know, Harry. I have not seen her since she left the office with that knife concealed in her pocket."

"What! Did she not wait for you outside?"

"No," replied Ellis, gloomily, "there was not a sign of her, although I searched all round. What is queerer still, she has not been home since. I have called twice at Myrtle Villa this afternoon, but no one is there."

"Queer. I wonder what she is up to. After all, Bob, the burning of the will does not amount to much. Mrs Moxton, as the dead man's widow, retains half the money. Busham has not got the whole."

"No, but he will get it," said the doctor, vehemently. "He'll not keep silence in spite of her giving up half. He will blackmail her into giving up the whole by threatening to betray her sister."

"You forget. By burning the will he has committed a felony. If Mrs Moxton is clever she can checkmate him with that."

Ellis shook his head doubtfully. "I think not, Harry. She might get him put in prison; but then, in revenge, he could hang her sister. No, Busham is all right on that point; he would not have burnt the will had he not known how to protect himself."

Cass stared at the ceiling and mused for a few moments. "From what you tell me of Zirknitz," he said at length, "I am not inclined to trust that man. He is too thick with Busham, and, moreover, he is a venal creature who would sell any information for money."

"Do you think he is in league with Busham?"

"I would not put him on so high a plane. I think he is the tool of Busham, though. I should not be at all surprised to find the whole of this mystery traced to that Esher Lane office."

"What! Do you think that Busham is guilty?"

"No; he is too clever to risk his neck."

"Zirknitz?"

"No; the Austrian is a coward."

"Then what do you mean?"

"I hardly know how to explain," said Cass. "I fancy old Moxton's money is at the bottom of all this business, and that Busham is the moving spirit. Watch him, Bob, he is the clue to the mystery."

"H'm! I don't know. He is too crafty for me to tackle directly, but I might get at his secret through other people. The person to question, Harry, is Janet Gordon. Mrs Moxton evidently thinks her guilty, and to save her surrendered the property. Now,

I wish to see the girl personally and judge for myself."

"Mrs Moxton won't speak out."

"Hitherto she has refused, but in the face of the destroyed will she may do so. I shall question her closely when I next see her."

"You are still firm in your belief about her honesty?"

"Yes; and I still love her," said Ellis, firmly. "Depend upon it, Harry, when the truth comes to light, Mrs Moxton will not be to blame."

"Humph!" said Cass. "I hope so, for your sake, since you are so bent upon making her your wife. But I tell you one thing, Ellis, the widow won't show herself again to you in a hurry."

"Why not?"

"Because, like Zirknitz, she will not risk your indiscreet questions. She has gone away to avoid answering them. My opinion is that she will remain away."

For the next few days the arrest of events in connection with the case seemed to point to a realisation of this prophecy. Mrs Moxton did not return to Myrtle Villa, and it remained shut up and empty. Dr Ellis called at least once a day, but on no occasion did he find the widow within. From the time she vanished so suddenly from Busham's office, he never set eyes on her. Firm as was his belief in her innocence, Ellis began to have his doubts about her absolute rectitude. Why had she vanished? Why did she remain away from her best friend, as she considered him to be? Whither had she gone? Ellis wondered if he could trace her, but, after

consideration, decided in the negative. There was no clue to her hiding-place. She had disappeared as a drop of water in a mighty ocean. Failing in his attempt to trace the widow, Ellis made up his mind to follow another clue. For this purpose, four or five days after Mrs Moxton's disappearance, he sought out number thirty-two in Geneva Square, Pimlico. Here, according to Busham's statement, he expected to find Janet Gordon.

Everybody in London knows Geneva Square. It obtained an unpleasant celebrity in connection with the tragedy of the Silent House, and was given as a sketch in many weekly papers at the time of the murder. The Silent House is pulled down now, and its position occupied by a brand-new mansion of red brick, which, amongst the sober grey houses of the square, looks like a purple patch on a ragged cloak. Number thirty-two was in the corner of the square, and from the notice in the window Ellis saw that it was a boarding-house. On inquiring for its mistress, a sluttish servant introduced him into a tawdry drawing-room, where he found himself in the presence of a lean, yellow-faced woman, over-dressed and effusive in manner. At one time of her life Mrs Amber—such she informed him was her name—must have been very pretty, but the years had turned her into a lean and withered hag on the wrong side of forty. She wore a gaudy pink tea-gown, trimmed with cheap black lace, and carried on wrists and neck a

considerable number of jingling ornaments, inexpensive and showy. For the sake of her faded beauty the window-blinds were drawn down, and Ellis found himself in a kind of subdued twilight. Mrs Amber was affected and garrulous, but, on the whole, did not appear to be an ill-natured woman. She seemed to have a high opinion of Janet Gordon.

"Dr Ellis!" said she, disposing herself in a graceful attitude in a basket-chair. "Do you wish to see me with a view to becoming a lodger?"

"No, madam. I have come to inquire for Miss Gordon."

Mrs Amber raised her painted eyebrows—they were painted although the obscurity of the room prevented that fact becoming too apparent. "You are a day after the fair, doctor," said Mrs Amber with an artificial laugh. "I regret to say that Miss Gordon has left us."

"Left this house?" said Ellis, astonished at this information.

"Three days ago she left us. Her sister came for her and took her away. I am very sorry Miss Gordon is gone; I always had, and always shall have, the highest opinion of Miss Gordon. Of course, she was not the kind of person with whom I have been accustomed to associate," added Mrs Amber, arranging the bracelets on her lean wrists, "being only an attendant at a low music-hall. Still, she was thoroughly respectable, and a thorough lady, I will say that. You wonder, perhaps, Dr Ellis, that I should have a lodger of that occupation.

But I am liberal in my views. I was on the boards myself many years ago. You must have heard of the beautiful Miss Tracey, who appeared in the burlesque of 'Cupid,' at the Piccadilly Theatre—I was Miss Tracey. I was Cupid, and I retired only when I married Mr Amber. Ah!" sighed the ex-actress, "he is dead now, and I keep a boarding-house. Such is life!"

As soon as Ellis could cut short these biographical reminiscences he did so. "I am sure that Miss Gordon is all you say, madam," he observed politely. "But can you tell me where she now is?"

"No," replied Mrs Amber, promptly, "I can not. Her sister came for her. She packed her box and they left the house. She gave no address to the driver of the cab. Mrs Moxton simply told him to go to the Marble Arch. I was out at the time Mrs Moxton arrived, and she went straight up to her sister's bedroom. I was glad that I returned before Miss Gordon went away."

"Why do you say that?" asked Ellis. "Did you not see her daily?"

Mrs Amber glanced round apprehensively. "I wouldn't say it to everybody," said Mrs Amber, giving a queer reason for her confidence, "but as you are a stranger it does not matter. Since that horrid murder of poor young Moxton, Miss Gordon has been very strange. She came back from seeing her sister on the night of the crime, and from that time until she left, remained shut up in her room."

"Shut up in her room?"

"Yes. Was it not strange? In vain I wished to see her. She refused to let me into the room. Sarah, my servant, took up her meals and told me that Miss Gordon was in bed the whole time. Through the door, and by sending a message with Sarah, I implored her to have a doctor, but she refused constantly. Yet when she went away she did not look so ill as Mrs Moxton. Ah!" said Mrs Amber, expressively, "she looked ill if you like."

"Strange!" murmured Ellis. "I suppose you knew the Moxtons intimately?"

"Very intimately. Laura Gordon lived here before her marriage, and she was married to Edgar Moxton from this house. It was terrible that he should have been killed in so savage a manner, Dr Ellis. I never liked Mr Moxton; but I must say I was horrified when I heard of his doom. I wonder who killed him?"

"That is what I and many other people would like to know," said Ellis, drily. "I suppose you guess from my name, Mrs Amber, that I am the doctor who examined the body?"

"Yes. I guessed that when I received your card, and was certain of it when you asked for Miss Gordon. You know Miss Gordon, of course?"

"No, I never set eyes on her."

"Really! Then why do you wish to see her?" asked Mrs Amber, anxiously.

"To see if she knows anything about this murder."

Mrs Amber did not reply immediately, but trembled so violently that her ornaments jingled like so many little bells. "Dr Ellis," said she at length, in a shaking voice, "you speak the doubts that are in my own mind."

"What! Do you think she knows of the murder?"

"I am unwilling to harm Miss Gordon," said Mrs Amber, in a scared tone, "as I have a great respect for her. But I fancy she must have seen something on that night or she would not have shut herself up in her bedroom all these weeks. And, Dr Ellis, do you know I have sometimes suspected her myself."

"Of the murder?"

Mrs Amber nodded. "I was afraid of getting into trouble if I spoke," she said nervously, "and I really can't bring myself to believe that Miss Gordon killed her brother-in-law. But Sarah brought down a pair of cuffs to be washed—Miss Gordon's cuffs—and they were spotted with blood!"

CHAPTER XV

WHAT MRS AMBER KNEW

MRS AMBER made this communication in a whisper, and then drew back to see what effect it would have on Ellis. He appeared to be less surprised than she expected, for the scene in Busham's office had prepared him to suspect Janet Gordon. Therefore he was not astonished to find his suspicions confirmed, but he did not go quite so far in his accusation as Mrs Amber.

"For reasons which I need not repeat," said he, deliberately, "I am not so surprised as you expect me to be. I have long thought that Miss Gordon might know of the murder, but I most emphatically decline to believe that she struck the blow herself."

"But the cuffs were stained with blood. I washed them myself, and told Sarah to hold her tongue."

"Miss Gordon may have handled the body after the death, Mrs Amber, but I do not think she killed the man. If you read the report of the evidence I gave at the inquest you will remember that I stated no woman could have struck so firm and sure a blow. I hold to that opinion. Moxton was stabbed by a man."

"What man?"

"That is what I wish to ask you, Mrs Amber."

The ex-actress turned pale beneath her rouge, and two red spots glowed crudely on her white cheeks. "I!" she exclaimed, drawing back. "How do I know who killed Mr Moxton?"

"I do not say that you know, but from your experience of the man, and from a certain amount of knowledge which you must have of his past life, it is not improbable that your suspicions may have fallen on someone who had a grudge against him."

"No," declared Mrs Amber, vehemently. "I suspect no one—that is, I *did* suspect Miss Gordon because of those blood-stained cuffs. But from what you say she cannot have struck the blow, so I can guess at no

one else. If I had done so I should have come forward to give evidence. It was my personal liking for Miss Gordon which made me hold my tongue. Besides, I never saw the cuffs until the inquest was over and Moxton was buried," finished Mrs Amber, naïvely.

" You have known Mrs Moxton and her sister for some time?"

" For four years, more or less. They are twins, you know, and very much alike, but I think Janet the cleverer of the two. Certainly she has the finer character, and the more generous spirit. Laura is fickle and vain."

Ellis did not agree with this, and, being in love with the Laura aforesaid, was vexed to hear such deprecatory criticism. However, he consoled himself with the hackneyed reflection, weak in so clever a man, that women never spoke well of one another, and continued his inquiries. " Mrs Moxton earned her money by type-writing, did she not?"

" Yes. Janet wanted to keep her out of mischief, so selected that employment as the best for her. Laura wished to be an attendant in the Merryman Music-Hall, also, but this Janet would not allow."

" I wonder the sisters could not obtain better employment."

" My dear Dr Ellis, they were wretchedly poor and had to take what they could get. Anything to earn their bread and butter."

" Where did they come from?"

" I don't know. They came to me recommended by Herr Schwartz, and I took them in as

cheaply as I could, because I fancied Janet's face. Ah, me," sighed Mrs Amber, " I trust I have not been mistaken. But so good a girl! No! in spite of those cuffs I believe in her still. Why, Dr Ellis, Janet is worth a dozen of her sister or that scampish brother."

" Zirknitz! do you know him?"

" Yes, I do," replied Mrs Amber, bluntly, " and I don't like him. He was here with the girls for some weeks, and let them slave and work while he idled about. He left pretty soon, as I remonstrated with him on the subject, and I wasn't sorry to see his back."

" You know Schwartz also, it seems."

" Of course. I was in a theatrical company of his once," cried Mrs Amber, with great vivacity. " Papa Schwartz is a dear, good man. He helped Janet by engaging her at the hall. She was his private secretary."

" I thought she sold programmes?"

" Oh, yes, and showed people to their seats. She did that also, but she really was the secretary of Papa Schwartz. Sometimes Laura went to the hall, and it was there she met Moxton. He fell in love with her and married her. She brought her pigs to a pretty market," said Mrs Amber, vigorously but vulgarly, " but she would marry the beast in spite of all that Janet could say."

" Do you know about Captain Garret?"

" And Hilda? Of course I do. They lived with me for some time. Poor girl, she is blind, and Papa Schwartz is devoted to her."

"What about her father?"

Mrs Amber shrugged her shoulders and jingled her bracelets. "Oh! he is well enough," said she, in a disparaging tone. "A broken-down military dandy. Hilda would be in the workhouse so far as he is concerned. It is Papa Schwartz who keeps them both."

"In spite of his reputation Schwartz seems to be a good man," said Ellis, musingly. "You say that he engaged Janet Gordon as his private secretary. How was that?"

"He knew her in Germany, or Austria, or somewhere."

"Indeed! have she and her sister lived abroad?"

"Yes, for a considerable time I believe. Their stepfather was a M. Zirknitz, as I learnt from that horrid Rudolph. But I really do not know anything about their past life, doctor. Janet held her tongue, and so did Laura, in spite of her frivolity. Who they are or where they came from I do not know. Papa Schwartz might."

"I shall see him about it. There appears to be some mystery about these girls, Mrs Amber."

"I agree with you, doctor. But I am certain they are ladies."

"Did you see Miss Gordon when she arrived here after the murder?"

"No, she came in after midnight and used her latchkey. I thought nothing of it at the time, as her business kept her out late. But when I wished to see her about the murder, which was in the morning papers, she refused to let me enter the room. I never saw her until two or three days ago, when she went away."

"Did Mrs Moxton come to see her?"

"No, Mrs Moxton never came near her, except this last time to take her away. Where they have gone I know no more than the man in the moon."

"Did anyone come to see her while she was in her bedroom?"

"Papa Schwartz did, but she refused to admit him."

"I wonder if he will know their whereabouts?"

"He might," said Mrs Amber, with a nod. "Janet is his secretary."

"She was, but she is not now," contradicted Ellis. "She gave up her place."

Mrs Amber's face expressed unqualified amazement. "Dear me, how does she intend to live?"

"I don't know. Mrs Moxton may keep her."

"But Mrs Moxton hasn't a shilling. Her husband's father disinherited him for marrying her."

"Oh, she will come in for some of the property," said Ellis, trying to explain without mentioning about the burnt will. "Old Moxton died intestate, so half his estate will go to his son's widow. But tell me, Mrs Amber, do you know a man called Busham?"

"No, I never heard the name."

"He did not call here?"

"Not to my knowledge. Who is he?"

"Mrs Moxton's lawyer." Ellis rose to take his leave. "Well, Mrs Amber," he said, "I am much obliged for the information you have given me. For certain private reasons I wish to find out

who murdered Moxton, but it seems you cannot help me."

"No, I know of no one. I cannot guess who would be such a villain. But if anyone knows, it will be Janet Gordon. She must have handled the body, as those blood-stained cuffs show."

"You knew that she was at Dukesfield on that night?"

"Yes, she told me she was going, and that M. Zirknitz intended to fetch her home. That was why I wished to see her next day when the papers were full of the murder. I thought she might know something about it. And I am sure she does know," cried Mrs Amber; "else why did she shut herself up in her room all these weeks? I wouldn't have stood it from anyone but Janet Gordon, I can tell you."

"You appear to have a great admiration for her."

"I have. Women, Dr Ellis, do not as a rule admire one another, but when I know how Janet Gordon has protected that silly sister of hers, and looked after her scampish brother, I think of her as one of the noblest women I have ever met."

With this eulogy bestowed, in the opinion of Ellis, on the wrong woman, Mrs Amber parted from him with theatrical effusion. The doctor left the Pimlico house in a musing frame of mind. It was strange that Mrs Amber, who seemed to be a good-natured woman in spite of her many affectations, should think so little of Mrs Moxton. Ellis piqued himself upon being a reader of character, and he could not bring

himself to believe that he was mistaken in the widow. But he was puzzled to think how completely Mrs Amber's estimate of her nature differed from his own. Thinking about Mrs Moxton recalled his mind to the fact of her disappearance, and he wondered if Schwartz would know of her whereabouts. With this in his mind he hailed a hansom and drove to Soho. In the meantime, pending the discovery of Mrs Moxton, he dismissed all speculations concerning her from his mind. So far as he could see, time and association were needed to explain her very complex character. After the interview with Mrs Amber, the doctor considered the little woman more of a sphinx than ever, and he wanted her to speak and unravel the enigma of her being.

Schwartz was in his office when Ellis sent in his card, and saw the doctor at once. He looked more than a trifle careworn, but his pleasure in seeing Ellis was great, and he advanced towards him with outstretched hands. Nothing could have been more genial than his welcome.

"Aha, mine goot doctor," said he, in his guttural voice, "dis is kind to come and zee me. But you haf not peen to zee mine Hilda. Dat is wrong."

"I have been very busy, Mr Schwartz, but I will pay you a visit next week—say on Thursday afternoon."

"Ach, dat is goot. At what time, for I must be in mine house when you zee the eyes of mine poor Hilda."

"Four o'clock on Thursday next," said Ellis, booking the visit. "Oh, yes, I know the address. Goethe Cottage, Alma Road, Parkmere."

"Dat is zo, doctor. I vill wait you on that day. And what did you wish to zee me about?"

"Mrs Moxton. She has left Dukesfield, and I wish to learn where she is."

The fat face of the German lost its genial expression. "Ach, she haf gone. Vell, and why do you come to me, doctor?"

"I have been told that you are an old friend of Mrs Moxton and Miss Gordon."

"Zo! Who told you?"

"Mrs Amber, of Geneva Square, Pimlico."

"Ach, she was in a gombany of mine. I know her. Vell, yes, I am a frent of Miss Corton, but she haf left me. I do not know vere she is now."

"Has she not seen you lately?"

"Not, not des many veeks. And Mrs Moxton haf gone?"

"Yes, she called at Pimlico for her sister, and they went off together."

"Why do you want to finze zem?"

"Because I have something to tell Mrs Moxton."

"Zo! About ze murder of dat boor man?"

"Well, not exactly, but Busham, the—"

The eyes of Schwartz suddenly flashed with rage. "Ah, he is a pig, zat man. I could kill him."

"Do you know him?"

"Ach, I knows him. I did throw him out of mine music-

halls. Vell, vell, do not talk of him, or I vill be angry. If you wish to know of Mrs Moxton zee Zirknitz."

"Will he know?"

"I zink zo. If he does not, no one vill."

With this information Ellis was obliged to be content, but as he left the hall he observed that the German looked after him with a very singular expression.

CHAPTER XVI

ANOTHER MYSTERY

THE behaviour of Schwartz perplexed Ellis, and during his home-ward journey he pondered over the meaning of that glance. Could it be possible that the German was lying; that Janet Gordon had seen him, and had confessed what she knew of the crime? Ellis did not know what to think, but he was satisfied that the woman could solve the mystery. But she was not to be found; she had vanished as suddenly as Mrs Moxton, and it seemed as though both of them were keeping out of the way lest they should get into trouble. But Ellis was bent upon discovering them at all costs.

In order to achieve this necessary purpose he kept a close watch on Myrtle Villa for the next few days, but all in vain. The house remained empty, and Mrs Moxton gave no sign of reappearing. Ellis advertised judiciously in the *Standard*, but no notice was taken of his advertisement; he waited impatiently for the post, but no

letter arrived. Mrs Moxton and her sister had vanished as completely as though the earth had swallowed them up. The anxiety began to tell on Ellis's health, and Harry Cass advised him to abandon his pursuit of these shadows. As an intimate friend, Cass was brutally candid.

"It is no use mincing matters, Bob," said he, "the widow never loved you, and has made use of you only to secure her own ends. She will never return to Dukesfield."

"She must, Harry; if only to take the furniture out of her house."

"Oh, I daresay she will delegate that office to Zirknitz. There is no doubt that Janet Gordon knows the truth about the murder, and has confessed it to Mrs Moxton. That is why both women are keeping out of the way."

"Zirknitz," repeated Ellis, paying no attention to the latter part of this speech. "I quite forgot about him. He may know where they are?"

"If he does he will not tell."

"I'll see about that, Harry. To-morrow I shall call on Zirknitz."

Cass shrugged his shoulders, but said no more. The obstinacy of Ellis was not to be overcome by argument, so, like a wise man, the journalist did not waste his breath in futile protestations. Secretly he was pleased that Mrs Moxton should have voluntarily taken herself out of the way, as he did not wish Ellis to marry her. But in his own mind he was

satisfied that the widow herself had proved by her last action that there was little fear of such an alliance taking place. To gain her own ends she had feigned a passion for Ellis; now that she saw nothing further was to be got out of him she had put an end to a disagreeable situation by disappearing. And this—in the opinion of Cass—was the end of Mrs Moxton and her shady doings.

The next day Ellis went to see Zirknitz, the first thing in the morning, as he hoped to catch him before he left home. He knew that the Austrian was the most indolent of men, as Mrs Moxton had told him as much, so it was unlikely that he would find him out of bed before ten o'clock. The doctor presented himself at the Bloomsbury lodging shortly before eleven, and found that even at so late an hour Zirknitz had not shaken off his slumbers. A smart maid-servant conducted him into an elegantly-furnished sitting-room, and took in his card. Shortly she returned with a message that M. Zirknitz in ten minutes would be at the disposal of his visitor. Like its owner, the room was very pretty. Wherever Zirknitz got the money to pander to his luxurious tastes, he certainly knew how to spend it. Ellis marvelled at the luxury by which he was surrounded, and wondered in what shady way it had been obtained. The walls were hung with Japanese silks of marvellous design and colouring, the floor was covered with a velvet-pile carpet of pale green,

with a pattern of primroses. Green silk curtains draped the windows; there were charming pictures in every corner, and the furniture—also of pale green—was in the best possible taste. Near the window stood a piano, opposite to it a satinwood book-case filled with French novels, and everywhere articles of useless luxury, evidently bought merely for the sake of buying. While Ellis was wondering at this bachelor's paradise, which more resembled the boudoir of a pretty woman, M. Zirknitz, fresh and pink from his bath, appeared through an inner door. He wore a loose dressing-gown of blue silk, and looked wonderfully handsome, if a trifle effeminate. With a joyous air he advanced to greet his visitor.

"*Cher ami*, so you have found me out. Well, I am charmed to see you, doctor. Is that chair comfortable? Good. Try this cigarette, it is a new brand. Can I offer you any refreshment—No? Ah, you are wiser than the majority of Englishmen. They eat and drink too much; bad for the nerves, pardy. Over-eating, over-feeding. *Quelle bêtise.*"

Zirknitz ran on thus lightly, but kept a sharp eye on his visitor, as he was anxious to know what had brought him there so early in the morning. Having fulfilled the duties of hospitality, he waited for Ellis to explain himself, which the doctor did almost immediately.

"I have called, M. Zirknitz, to inquire if you can inform me of the whereabouts of Mrs Moxton?"

"Eh? How should I know?"

Am I my sister's keeper? Is she not in Myrtle Villa, Dukesfield?"

"No, she has not been there for five days. Your sister Janet has disappeared from Pimlico also."

"How do you know that, my brave doctor?" demanded Zirknitz, mockingly, yet with a shade of anxiety in his manner.

"Because I called there. Mrs Amber informed me that Mrs Moxton had taken away Miss Gordon. She did not know whither they had gone. I thought you might have had some idea."

"I fear, monsieur, I cannot assist you. I have not seen Mrs Moxton since that day you spoke to me at Dukesfield. My sisters leave me much to myself. Why do you wish to see them?"

"I have my reasons," said Ellis, stiffly.

"And they are connected with that murder. *Mon cher* Ellis, *soyez tranquille*. I do not want to penetrate your secrets. I do not know where mesdames my sisters are. If I did I should tell you most assuredly, in spite of your bad opinion of me. But I am pleased you have come." Here M. Zirknitz rose and touched an electric button. "You will hear from my landlady that I was here on the night our dear Edgar was killed."

"I don't want any evidence to prove that, M. Zirknitz. I am satisfied that you are innocent."

"*Bon*. But there is a doubt in your suspicious English mind which peeps out of your eye. Ah, here is Jane. Jane," addressing the smart servant, "will you be

so kind as to tell Mrs Pastor I wish to see her at once. A pretty girl, Jane," resumed Zirknitz, as she vanished. "I like pretty women and all pretty things. You think my rooms nice, eh?"

"Charming. But I did not know you were so rich."

"Rich? *Ma foi*, I am as poor as a mousie mouse. If you——"

Before the Austrian could explain the source of his domestic magnificence his landlady entered the room. She was a formidable-looking woman, as tall as a Guardsman, with a severe face and the glance of a predatory bird. Dressed in black, with a lace cap and lace apron, she presented a wonderfully dignified and stately appearance. Anyone more unlike the scampish, airy Zirknitz it would have been impossible to conceive, yet the relaxing of her iron visage and the softening of her eagle glance showed that Mrs Pastor was under the spell of her lodger's charm of manner. He greeted her with a sunny smile when she entered, and pointed to a chair, but Mrs Pastor tacitly refused to be seated, and continued to stand bolt upright in the doorway.

"*Chère madame*," said Zirknitz, in his most caressing tone, "this is Dr Ellis, of Dukesfield, who examined the dead body of my brother-in-law, Mr Moxton. He wants to know at what hour I returned here on the night of August 16th last, the night of the murder."

"Is it possible, sir, that you suspect Monsieur Zirknitz in any

way?" asked Mrs Pastor, solemnly, addressing herself to Ellis.

"No, I do not. M. Zirknitz is performing a little comedy for his own satisfaction."

"*Eh bien*," said Rudolph, with a graceful wave of his hand, "then for my own satisfaction, madame, tell this dear doctor what I ask."

"Monsieur Zirknitz returned here at a quarter to twelve," said Mrs Pastor. "I was still out of bed, and I admitted him myself. Next morning, when we were informed of the murder, M. Zirknitz begged me to take note of the time."

"Most assuredly," broke in the Austrian, impetuously, "for evil people might have accused me of the murder, since I was at Dukesfield then. But you see, my brave Ellis, I was here before twelve. As monsieur, *mon beau frère*, met his fate by your own showing about half-past eleven, I must be innocent."

"I quite believe in your innocence," said Ellis, rising. "There is no need to convince me so thoroughly. Thank you, M. Zirknitz, for the trouble you have taken in proving your case. Since you know nothing of the whereabouts of your sisters, my errand here is at an end. I shall go now."

"Ah, I am sorry to lose you. *Je suis désolé, mon bon ami*. Another cigarette? No? Good-bye. *Au revoir!* Some day we shall meet again. Mrs Pastor, may I ask you to conduct monsieur, *mon ami*, to the door."

The landlady bowed solemnly, and, leading Ellis from the society of this graceful babbler, dismissed

him with a second bow into the street. And in this unsatisfactory way ended the doctor's visit to the Austrian. Unsatisfactory, because he had obtained no information save that Zirknitz was innocent of the imputed charge, a conclusion at which Ellis had long since arrived. That same evening, after supper, he informed Cass about the *alibi*, but found that the journalist was less ready to accept the information.

"I don't trust Zirknitz," said he, emphatically, "neither does Schwartz. The man is a bad egg. I believe this murder is a family affair to get money. Zirknitz, I daresay, murdered Moxton with that knife. Janet saw him do so, and told Mrs Moxton, and they have both disappeared so that they may not be asked questions likely to lead to their brother's arrest. As for Busham, now that the will is destroyed he will hold his tongue."

"But the *alibi*," protested Ellis. "If Zirknitz was at Bloomsbury before midnight, he could not have been in Dukesfield at half-past eleven."

"The *alibi* may be a false one."

"You would not say so if you saw the witness to its truth. Mrs Pastor is a regular Puritan, as rigid and unbending as a piece of iron."

"Yet she tolerates that frivolous scamp?"

Ellis shrugged his shoulders. "All women have their weaknesses," said he. "However, the main point is, that Zirknitz could not inform me of his sisters' whereabouts."

"Humph! Would not, rather than could not, I should say," observed Cass, crossly. "I don't believe myself that you will see Mrs Moxton again, and I fervently hope that such will be the case. You have now one or two patients, Bob, the nucleus of a good practice, so give up this wildgoose chase after the widow and settle down to your work."

Before Ellis could answer this friendly appeal, which was made in all good faith, Mrs Basket entered with a note for Ellis, which had been brought that moment by a boy. "Clark, the grocer's son," explained the fat landlady. "I 'ope, doctor, it's a noo patient, for if ever a gent deserved the sick and ailing, you are that gent," after which expression of sympathy Mrs Basket waddled out of the room with much noise.

"Great heavens!" cried Ellis, who was reading the note.

"What is the matter, Bob?"

For answer Ellis threw the note to Cass on the sofa, and he read it also. Then the two men looked at one another in amazement. And well they might be amazed, for the note inviting Ellis to call at Myrtle Villa, was from no less a person than Janet Gordon.

"Why should she write to me?" asked Ellis, on finding his tongue.

"Mrs Moxton must have told her about your friendly spirit. Perhaps she wishes to confide in you, and her sister has brought her to Myrtle Villa for that purpose. Shall you go, Bob?"

"Go? I should think so. Tonight I may learn the secret of the murder," and Ellis, putting on

hat and coat, immediately left the room in a great hurry.

He ran rather than walked to Myrtle Villa, and to his joy, saw a light in the sitting-room window. Mrs Moxton, the woman he loved, had returned, and Ellis could hardly restrain his joy when the widow herself opened the door to him. After greetings, hurried and brief, were over, she conducted him into the sitting-room. At once Ellis looked round for the writer of the note.

"Where is your sister?" he asked.

"She is in the next room. You will see her soon. But you are making a mistake, Dr Ellis. I wrote that note asking you to call."

"You? Good heavens! Then you are—"

"I am Janet Gordon. It is my sister who is Mrs Moxton."

cheeks were pale, there were dark circles under her eyes, and she had the nervous, agitated manner of one suffering from a great strain.

"Yes, I am Janet Gordon," said she with a sigh, "and I have been masquerading as my sister ever since the terrible night of her husband's murder. My reasons for doing so you shall learn later on, for I am determined to tell you the whole truth of this matter so far as it is known to me."

"This is the secret you have been keeping from me?" said Ellis, much agitated.

Miss Gordon nodded. "I was afraid to speak before, even to so good a friend as yourself. But I find that I can bear my burden no longer; so I turn to you for help and comfort. You must aid me, you must see after my unhappy sister who lies in the next room."

"Is she guilty of the murder?" asked the doctor, rather harshly.

"No, no," cried Janet, trembling. "She is innocent, although appearances are against her. You will hear her story about that night from herself, but first I intend to relate my life history. I do not wish you to have a wrong opinion of me, Dr Ellis."

"I could never have that, Miss Gordon," said Ellis, promptly. "I always believed that you were more sinned against than sinning. I wonder I did not guess at your identity before. Schwartz and Mrs Amber both spoke highly of you, and I could not reconcile their opinion of Mrs Moxton with what I knew of you under that name. Your explanation makes all clear."

CHAPTER XVII

A LIFE HISTORY

TO say that Ellis was amazed by the discovery that the pseudo Mrs Moxton was really Janet Gordon, would be to give a feeble idea of his feelings. For some moments he was too thunderstruck to speak, and remained staring at Miss Gordon as though she were a ghost. Seeing this, the girl—for she was no more—gently took his hand and guided him to a comfortable chair by the fire. Then she sat down at his elbow and explained herself seriously. She was as pretty as ever, but her

"How do you know Mrs Amber?"

"I went there to see the supposed Janet Gordon, and Mrs Amber told me that you—that is Mrs Moxton—had gone."

"I was afraid to leave my sister there after what Busham said," replied Janet, with a troubled air. "I let him burn the will, so that he might hold his tongue about Laura, for I saw that he suspected her. I took Laura to Bayswater, where we lived quietly for the last few days. But she is ill, and seeing no way out of the difficulty, and being in want of money, I resolved to bring Laura here and ask for your help."

"It will be freely given, I assure you."

In spite of the gravity of the situation, Ellis looked at his companion with so meaning a gaze that her cheek flushed and her eyes dropped before his. Yet she raised a deprecating hand to quell his emotion. "No, no, not yet, perhaps never. You must hear my story before you can think of me in that way."

"I shall always think the same of you. You are the dearest and the noblest of women. But I must confess that I am anxious to hear your confession. Begin at once; I am all attention."

Janet folded her hands on her black dress and looked musingly at the fire. There was a shadow on her resolute face cast by some bitter memory of the past. Ellis watched her in silence, and noted with pity how weary and worn she looked. Her reverie continued for two or three moments. Then

she raised her head and related her unhappy past in quiet, melancholy tones.

"Laura and I are twins," she began. "We are very much alike in looks, but entirely different in disposition. I am strong-minded and calm; she is frivolous and highly excitable—indeed, sometimes I think she is not in her right senses, so furious are her rages. She has the fiery Celtic nature inherited from our mother, who was a Highland woman. I am more like my father, who was a calm-tempered, persevering man. We were born in Edinburgh, where my parents lived for some years after their marriage. My father was a doctor, and made a great deal of money."

"How strange that I should be a doctor" also, said Ellis, meaningly.

Janet smiled and shook her head at the interruption. "As I say, my father made a great deal of money," she continued, "for he had a large and increasing practice, but a chill he contracted while visiting a patient in the country carried him off when Laura and I were ten years old. My mother was left a widow and well off, so taking a dislike to Edinburgh after her husband's death, she travelled abroad. For some years we wandered on the Continent, and Laura and I were educated at several schools, but my mother so wished to keep us beside her, that I am afraid we gained little knowledge. However, we learnt to speak French, German and Italian, so we benefited in some degree by our roving

For some years things went on like this, until at Carlsbad my mother met with Colonel Zirknitz, who was in the Austrian army."

"Rudolph's father?"

"Yes. Rudolph was then eighteen years of age, Laura and I fifteen. My mother fell in love with Colonel Zirknitz, and hearing that she was rich, he married her. But I am sure that he never loved her. We went to Vienna and lived there for some time. Our step-father was not unkind, and treated my mother with every courtesy, but he was a gambler and a spendthrift."

"I see. The vices of Zirknitz are hereditary!"

Janet sighed. "I suppose so," said she, "but you must not be too hard on Rudolph, doctor. His failings are hardly vices. He has many good qualities."

"Mostly negative qualities, I fear, Miss Gordon. You are fascinated by that splendid scamp, like everyone else."

"That may be. Rudolph has not a fine character, and I have rather a contempt for him. All the same I am fond of him, although sometimes I feel angry for being so. Of course, Rudolph grew up with me, so to speak, and I look upon him as a brother. He was always wild; he has never done anything all his life, and although I have great influence over him I cannot get him to settle down."

"Is Colonel Zirknitz alive?" asked Ellis, anxious that she should proceed with her story.

"No, he died some time ago,

but lived long enough to spend all my mother's fortune."

"And is she dead also?"

"Yes, she is dead," sighed Janet. "She died six months after her husband. I believe the loss of him broke her heart. He was a singularly fascinating man."

"After seeing the son I can well believe that. What happened when you found yourself alone in the world?"

"I came back to London with Laura. We were left penniless in Vienna, but Rudolph procured money somehow—by gambling, I fancy, and came to England with us. We left him in London staying at Mrs Amber's house in Geneva Square, and went to Edinburgh to see if our father's relations would help us. Alas! they would do nothing."

"So much for the world's charity," said Ellis, cynically. "Brutes! what made them refuse, or, rather, what excuse did they make?"

"The excuse that my mother had married a second time. I begged and implored them to help Laura, if not me, but as they refused we came back to London. Rudolph behaved very well, for he paid our board at Mrs Amber's for some time; so you see, doctor, he has some good points."

"I suppose so," replied Ellis, grudgingly. "He could do no less. Then you met Schwartz, I suppose?"

"We did. Some years ago in Germany we knew him, and on hearing of our penniless condition he gave me first an engagement as an attendant, and afterwards

made me his private secretary. He offered to take on Laura also as an attendant, but I knew how frivolous she was, so I got her a situation in a type-writing office instead. I might have saved myself the trouble of protecting her from harm," sighed Janet, wearily, "for look what she has come to."

"Why did she marry Moxton?"

"She was tired of poverty and work. Moxton was the heir to wealth, and he professed to love her deeply. Against my will she married the man. I think she was encouraged by Rudolph, who fancied Moxton, as a brother-in-law, would lend him money. But after the marriage took place Edgar had no money to lend. His father resented the marriage, and cut him off with a shilling. With what money he had inherited from his mother Edgar went abroad with my sister. He gambled and drank, and treated Laura cruelly, as he accused her of being the cause of his ruin. They came back to England, and lived in this house the life I described at the inquest in the character of Mrs Moxton."

"Ah," said Ellis, "now you come to the crucial point. Why did you impersonate your sister?"

"To save her from arrest and perhaps from death," replied Janet, feverishly. "I knew she could not face the inquest, or protect herself, and knowing that few people in this district were acquainted with her looks, and being very like her myself as her twin-sister, I seized the advan-

tage offered, and stepped into her shoes."

"You are a brave and noble woman, Miss Gordon. So all through these terrible months you have been fighting on your sister's behalf?"

"Yes; she could not fight for herself. Rudolph, of course, knew the truth and supported me. Do you not remember how he called me Laura when you met him here?"

"I remember," replied Ellis, drily. "He never faltered or hesitated once. I think the young man has a positive genius for intrigue. But now that we have arrived at this point, Miss Gordon, I should like to know what really happened on that night."

"I will tell you all I know," said Janet, frankly, "then you shall see Laura and hear her story." She paused for a moment and continued in rapid tones: "I came here on that night to pay a visit to Laura, as I knew that Edgar would be at the Merryman Music-Hall as usual. I found Laura in a state of nervous rage against her husband, as he left her at home night after night, kept her short of money, and was altogether cruel to her. Laura, as you must know, doctor, has a neurotic temperament, and when angered lets her temper carry her beyond all bounds. She inherited this disposition with her Highland blood from our mother, who was likewise given to these fits of causeless rage. Often and often I implored Edgar not to anger Laura, knowing how dangerous

she was when roused. But he neglected my warnings, and the pair were always fighting. I declare, doctor, that a dread of what might occur kept me in so nervous a state that I grew quite ill. I came down here constantly to soothe Laura, and never remained absent for any time without expecting to hear of a tragedy."

"I know the kind of irresponsible being your sister is," said Ellis, "and I do not wonder you were terrified. So the tragedy happened at last?"

"It did, and on that night," answered Janet, much agitated. "But it is not as you appear to think, doctor. Laura did not kill her husband."

"What about the carving-knife?"

"Oh, Edgar was killed with that, without doubt. What was said in Dukesfield about Laura carrying the knife was true. She was afraid of tramps in her half-hysterical state; and whenever a ring came to the door after dark she never opened it without arming herself with the knife. In this way she confronted the telegraph boy who spread the rumour."

"I wonder you did not take the knife from her," observed Ellis.

"If I had she would only have used a smaller knife. Well," continued Miss Gordon, "on that fatal night Laura was particularly angry with Edgar because she had been informed by Rudolph that he was flirting with Polly Horley. However, I managed to soothe her, and, as Rudolph never came for me as he promised, I left this house for the station a

few minutes after eleven. When I got near the station I found that I had forgotten my purse and returned for it; then, Dr Ellis," said Janet, clasping her hands, "I came on a terrible sight. Edgar was lying dead on the path, and Laura was lying beside him. The moon shone at intervals, so I saw all quite plainly. Finding Edgar was dead I thought Laura had murdered him, especially as the carving-knife lay on the path beside her. Laura revived very soon, and said she had not killed Edgar. I dragged her into the house; but picking up the carving-knife she said it was the cause of all, and threw it behind some laurels. I had no time to look for it, as my sole object was to get Laura away. I made her put on my hat and cloak and take my purse, telling her to go to Mrs Amber's and remain in her bedroom, and that I would impersonate her and see the matter through. Laura was beside herself with terror, saying that she was innocent; but she had wit enough to see her danger if she stayed. Therefore, she braced herself up and went away to take a cab to Pimlico. She got one and arrived at Geneva Square safely."

"Yes, and remained in her bedroom as you told her. Mrs Amber informed me of that. And you, Miss Gordon?"

"I," said Janet, simply, "assumed my sister's character and ran round to call you to see the corpse. You know the rest."

CHAPTER XVIII

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

AFTER Janet had finished her history there ensued a short silence. Ellis was lost in admiration at the wonderful pluck and resolution of the girl, which had enabled her to face and carry through a difficult matter for the sake of her weaker sister. Now that the worst was over—since she had rescued Laura Moxton from the ordeal of a public accusation—Janet seemed to be in danger of breaking down. After the tension of nerve and will came the inevitable relaxation. The impulse of Ellis was to take her in his arms, and comfort her with assurances of love and protection. But the time was not yet ripe for him to speak of his personal feelings. There was much to do, much to be learnt, before the crooked could be made straight; therefore Ellis, sacrificing self, began to question Janet on points which did not seem quite clear to him. At his first remark she braced herself and gave him immediate attention.

"If you thought that your sister had killed Moxton, why did you not hide the carving-knife?"

"How could I? She threw it away before I could stop her, and there was no time for me to search. When I sent Laura off, I had to call in you and the police, so I could not go out to look for it in the darkness. Next morning, when I could evade the policeman in charge, I slipped out to

search. But by that time the knife was gone."

"Busham took it," said Ellis, with a nod. "I wonder how he found it. There was no need for him to search. It looks as though he knew beforehand that with such a weapon Moxton had been stabbed, and came here to secure it."

Janet mused. "I have my doubts of Mr Busham," she said at last. "He knows more about the matter than he says. Indeed, I should not be at all surprised to hear that he is the guilty person!"

"Impossible! He declares that he can prove an *alibi*—that at the time of the crime he was talking to a policeman, and afterwards followed your sister to Pimlico."

"Have you seen the policeman?"

"No, but I intend to see him as soon as I learn his name or number from Busham."

"He won't tell it to you."

"I can but try, at all events. To do away with my suspicions he may speak out. But, Miss Gordon, I have yet to learn how Edgar Moxton was killed."

"Laura can tell you that," said Janet, rising. "Now that you have heard my story you must listen to what she has to say; then, doctor, you will see how to save her. I was forced into the position I took up."

"I shall be glad to hear Mrs Moxton's story. Shall I come with you?"

"No, Laura is not so ill as all that; she is merely lying down in the next room and I will bring her in shortly."

She left Ellis alone for a few minutes, which he employed in considering the possibility of Busham being implicated in the crime—indeed, he himself might be the actual criminal. Zirknitz had seen him following Moxton from the Dukesfield station, and his subsequent acts were related by himself as harmless ; but the story of the conversation with the policeman and the following of Mrs Moxton to Pimlico might be invented to hide the truth. There was nothing to show that Busham had not murdered Edgar, for at that time he was ignorant that Moxton's will was in existence, and by getting rid of his cousin he might hope to clutch a portion of his uncle's money. Ellis made up his mind to do two things—first to see Busham and learn with whom he had been engaged at the time of the crime ; second, to interview the policeman hinted at, and discover if Busham was speaking the truth. While he was arguing the necessity of this course in his own mind, Janet returned with Mrs Moxton leaning on her arm.

The resemblance between the sisters was striking. They were of the same height, their figures were moulded to the same contour, and in face, feature and colouring they were remarkably alike. The difference between them lay in the expression, and in the character of the eye. Laura's glance was soft and wandering, that of Janet steady and calm ; the face of Mrs Moxton was weak, the countenance of Miss Gordon firm. Janet, indeed,

seemed to be the masculine counterpart of her sister ; she had all the strength of will and resolution of purpose which the other lacked. She was a being of flesh and blood, Laura a shadow, a feather blown by the wind. At the first sight of her face Ellis no longer wondered that she had married a brute like Moxton. She would have married any man had the necessary force of will been exerted. When Ellis beheld this frail creature, when he recalled the evil, scampish nature of Rudolph Zirknitz, he admired Janet more than ever for the wonderful manner in which she had controlled the pair. She was a female Prospero, who ruled at once a weakly, flighty Ariel and a refined Caliban. It must be admitted, however, that the latter part of the above illustration is too severe on Zirknitz, as he was rather a Lazun, a Duc de Richelieu, a Count D'Orsay than the son of Sycorax. However, he was certainly a scamp and dangerous.

Mrs Moxton, who looked ill and weary, bowed in silence to Ellis, and sank exhausted into the chair vacated by her sister. Janet took a seat beside her and motioned with her head that the doctor should do the same. Ellis obeyed and looked at Mrs Moxton with some curiosity, but more eagerness, for from her lips he hoped to learn sufficient to indicate the mysterious assassin of Moxton. But the widow, with her eyes fixed on the fire, seemed in no hurry to begin.

"Laura, dear," said Janet, in a

coaxing tone, such as a nurse would use to a fractious child, "this is our best friend, Dr Ellis. He is the only one who can help us out of our difficulties, and I want you to tell him all you remember about Edgar's death."

Mrs Moxton uttered a low wail, and with a shudder covered her face. When she did speak, it was in so low a tone that Ellis could with difficulty catch what she was saying. "Shall I ever forget that horrible night?" she murmured.

"Tell Dr Ellis about it, dear," urged Janet, and after a pause Mrs Moxton did as she was requested. At first her voice was low and nervous, but as she proceeded in the recital it grew powerful. Her nerves responded to the demand made upon them, and gave her a surprising strength of speech in comparison with her frail body. From a physiological standpoint, Ellis was as much interested in her as in the story she told.

"Edgar and I quarrelled on that night about Polly Horley," she began, "for Rudolph told me that he was paying attention to that horrid woman. Edgar swore that it was not true, and I wanted to go to the music-hall to see for myself. He refused to take me and flung out of doors in a great rage. Then Janet came, and her company and conversation calmed me. When she went, and I was left alone, I grew frightened, and got out the carving-knife. I heard Edgar come in at the gate and, not thinking, I ran to open the door with the knife in my hand.

When I met him he was on the step, but seeing the knife, and knowing how furious I could be, I suppose he grew frightened. At anyrate, he ran back to the gate. I followed, calling out: 'Edgar, Edgar, what is the matter?' When I came up to him he must have thought I meant to strike him, for he was half drunk at the time. His face was white and terrified as I saw in the moonlight; although, as the night was cloudy, that was not very strong."

"I remember the night," interpolated Ellis; "it was windy and rainy, with a fitful moonlight showing through the flying clouds. Well, Mrs Moxton, what did your husband do when you came up to him?"

"He seized me by the throat," said the widow, hysterically. "I believe that, being half intoxicated, he wished to kill me, and I struggled to get away. But he held me tightly, so that I could not cry out. We were pressed right against the gate. I held the knife above my head, as I was afraid of hurting him with it."

"Why did you not drop it?" asked Ellis.

"I don't know. I never thought of dropping it. The more Edgar fought with me the tighter I held it. He was strangling me, and I could not cry out. Then I saw, all at once, a man on the other side of the gate."

"Could you describe his looks?" asked Ellis, eagerly.

Mrs Moxton shook her head. "Remember it was a darkish night, with only occasional gleams of moonlight. I was struggling

with Edgar, and, holding me by the throat, he had half strangled me. As I said, I held up the knife out of the way. The man on the other side of the gate wore a tall hat and a greatcoat with a fur collar. I tried to call out to Edgar, but he did not see the man. Suddenly the stranger snatched the knife out of my hand, and struck at Edgar's back. Edgar gave a yell which, I wonder, was not heard all over Dukesfield, so loud it was. He fell forward on me, and crushed by his weight, worn with the struggle, and terrified by the murder, I fainted clean away. The last thing I remember was that Edgar lay over me, struggling and moaning."

"Was the man still at the gate after he struck the blow?"

"I don't know. When I came to myself Janet was bending over me, and I was so frightened that I could explain nothing. After that I picked up the knife which was lying by Edgar's body and flung it over some bushes against the fence. Then Janet hurried me away, and told me she would take my place and deny everything. I was so dazed that I did not know what I was doing. I ran down to the cab-rank and told a cabman to drive me to Pimlico. He did so, and I recovered myself sufficiently in the cab to pay him, and to slip into the house with the latchkey which Janet had pushed into my hand. I knew that she still had our old room, so I ran up to it without seeing anyone, and locked myself in."

"Mrs Amber told me that you isolated yourself for weeks."

"I did so by Janet's advice, lest Mrs Amber should recognise me. Janet came to see me a few days afterwards, and told me about the inquest."

"Did you call at Geneva Square?" asked Ellis, turning to Miss Gordon. "That is strange, for Mrs Amber particularly explained that until a few days ago no one called save Schwartz."

"I paid a visit one night when Mrs Amber was at the theatre," explained Janet, "and I bribed Sarah, the servant—a most venal creature—to say nothing about it. It was necessary that I should tell Laura what had taken place, and hear her story. Now you know, doctor, why I fenced with you and refused to tell the truth. I was afraid lest my sister should be brought into the matter."

"But Mrs Moxton is innocent, and you knew it," protested Ellis.

"Yes, I am innocent," wailed Mrs Moxton, "but what could I do in the face of all I have told you? I cannot hold my tongue like Janet, or foresee things as she does. In one way or another I should have betrayed myself and perhaps have been arrested. Janet was right, Janet was wise to advise me to stay at Pimlico. I feigned ill-health, and would not let Mrs Amber into my room least she should get to know too much. Only Sarah knew me, as I had to confide in her to get food. But she held her tongue."

"She nearly betrayed you though, Mrs Moxton, by taking those cuffs to Mrs Amber."

"That was a mistake," said the widow. "In touching Edgar's body I got blood on my cuffs, and threw them aside in the bedroom. I never thought of hiding them, and Sarah took them downstairs without consulting me."

"How did you manage to keep up the concealment of your identity to the end?"

"I managed that," said Janet, in her firm, clear voice. "I called when I knew that Mrs Amber was absent, and told Laura that, on account of Busham, I intended to take her away. When Mrs Amber came back, of course she thought that I had been in my bedroom all the time, and that Laura had called for me. She was so deceived," added Janet, smiling, "that she told me how ill I looked after lying so long in bed. But I am afraid I did look ill, with all the worry."

"I don't wonder at it," said Ellis, sympathetically. "I cannot imagine how you have borne up through all the troubles you have had. Few women would have taken another's burden so bravely on their shoulders as you have done, Miss Gordon."

"Indeed, she has been the best of sisters," exclaimed Mrs Moxton, with tears in her eyes. "Never shall I forget what Janet has done for me."

"At some cost to yourself, dear Laura," said Janet, patting her sister's hand. "After all, my defence of you has cost you your fortune."

"I don't mind in the least, Janet. Let Mr Busham take all so long as he holds his tongue."

"I fancy Busham will keep silent for his own sake," remarked Ellis, drily, "for I feel certain that he has more to do with this murder than you think."

"You don't believe that he killed Edgar?"

"I might even go so far as that, but I must collect sufficient evidence to justify such belief. However, we can talk of that later. With reference to the destruction of the will, Miss Gordon, you need not worry about that."

"Oh, but I do. Laura will lose her father-in-law's money."

"Not by the destruction of the will, because the original document is in my possession, and what Busham burnt was a copy carefully prepared by myself and my friend Mr Cass."

CHAPTER XIX

THE RED POCKET-BOOK

"Do you mean to say that the paper Mr Busham destroyed was not Edgar's will?" asked Janet, while her sister uttered an exclamation of joy.

"I do mean it. I reported your conversation about our mutual friend to Cass, and we both agreed that he was not to be trusted with the original will. Cass, who is clever at imitating handwriting, procured a sheet of paper similar to that upon which the will was written, and copied it out, signatures and all. I am afraid it was a species of forgery, but as it had to be done if we wished to checkmate Busham,

we contrived the crime. It was just as well we did so, Miss Gordon, as Busham had no compunction in destroying the will. My wonder is that a clever pettifogger such as he is could not see that the document was forged. Singular obtuseness on his part."

"If it had remained longer in his possession, he no doubt would have discovered the truth," replied Janet, "but, if you remember, he merely glanced at it, and not crediting me with so clever an idea as substituting a copy for the original, took it for the genuine will. I can never thank you sufficiently, doctor, for what you have done."

"Nor I either," chimed in Laura, who, seeing that there was a prospect of recovering her husband's money, plucked up her spirits. "Now Mr Busham will not be able to rob me."

"H'm!" said Janet, with a frown; "putting the will out of the question, my dear, you are still in the same dangerous position as formerly. If he finds out the trick Dr Ellis has played him, he may denounce you."

"He will do so at his own risk," cried Ellis, promptly. "And you may be sure he will never learn the truth from me until it can be told with safety to Mrs Moxton. Leave Busham to me. I shall know how to deal with him. In some way or another we must clear up this mystery, and exonerate Mrs Moxton. If there was only some clue."

Janet and Laura looked meaningfully at one another. "There *is* a clue, although it is only a slight

one," said Miss Gordon, hesitatingly.

"To the identity of the murderer?"

"No, but a clue which may lead to his discovery. When Laura was lying in a faint, the man who stabbed Edgar robbed him of his pocket-book."

"But how could he do that without Moxton recognising him?" asked Ellis. "You know that Moxton did not die at once, but lived long enough to scrawl those blood signs on his arm denouncing Zirknitz. Now, I know that your brother is innocent, as he has established an *alibi* with the assistance of his landlady, Mrs Pastor."

"I cannot explain that, doctor, but undoubtedly Edgar thought that Rudolph stabbed him, and so wrote on his arm to let Laura know."

"You can read the cryptogram, I presume, Mrs Moxton?"

"Oh, yes, I know the signs very well. Janet taught them to me, and I showed them to Edgar for amusement. He, no doubt, wished me to know that Rudolph had stabbed him, but why he used the signs I cannot say. He hated Rudolph always, and would have got him into trouble if he could."

"Well," said Ellis, after a pause, "I can conceive no reason why he acted as he did. I don't suppose the truth will ever be revealed. But about this pocket-book, Mrs Moxton. How do you know that the murderer took it?"

"I only think so. It was a red Morocco pocket-book with Edgar's initials on it in gold. He

had it when he went out that night, and I saw him put it into his breast-pocket. When Janet came to Pimlico I asked her if she had seen it, as I thought that there might be some bank-notes in it, and we needed money badly."

"Did he carry money in it?"

"Yes, when he had any."

"On that night were there any notes in the pocket-book?"

"I cannot say. Rudolph declares that he won twenty pounds from Edgar on that night. Edgar could not pay him save with an I.O.U., so I don't think there could have been money in the book."

"Then why should the assassin steal it?"

"Why, indeed?" echoed Janet, who had been silent for some time; "that is what we wish to find out. As Edgar's jewellery was untouched, robbery could not have been the motive of the crime. I believe myself that the pocket-book must have contained some papers of value to the murderer. No person but he could have taken it, for I examined very carefully the clothes Edgar wore when he was killed, and could not find the pocket-book. Dr Ellis," said Janet, earnestly, "it seems to me that if you can find that book, you will be able to lay hands on the criminal."

"Possibly, Miss Gordon. But in what direction am I to look? In the autumn many men wear fur-lined overcoats, so that is not a strong clue. Moreover, the pocket-book must long since have been destroyed if the murderer valued his neck. No; on the

whole I think it will be best to see Busham, as I said before. My movements will depend upon the sort of information he supplies."

"He will tell you nothing."

"Not of his own free will, perhaps, but I may be in a position to force his confidence."

It was now late, as this conversation between the three had lasted a considerable time. Laura looked so fatigued and ill that Ellis, in his capacity of medical man, insisted that she should retire. "Take as much rest and sleep as you can, Mrs Moxton, and don't worry. I will help you all I can in this matter, and I have no doubt I shall be able to clear you of all suspicion. Good-night."

Ellis was accompanied to the door by Janet, who was hopeful of his success.

"You will be certain to solve this mystery—you and Mr Cass," said she. "Think how much you have discovered already by observation."

"And if I do solve it, and right your sister, what then, Miss Gordon?"

Janet laughed, and, in the kindly darkness, blushed. "We can talk of that when the time comes," she said, answering his thought after the manner of women.

With this assurance the doctor was fain to be content, and departed without gaining the kiss of which he had dreamt. Needless to say, he was more in love than ever, and thanked Heaven that he had been brought into contact with so noble and earnest a woman as Janet Gordon. Anxious to hear the result of his friend's

visit, Cass was waiting up for him, and into his astonished ears Ellis poured the whole story which exonerated and cleansed Janet. Cass admitted that he had been wrong in his estimate of her character.

"But how was one to read it properly under the circumstances," he said testily. "I could not believe in the woman without proof."

"I did," said Ellis, smiling.

"Because you are in love; yours was not legitimate belief. On the same mad principle you would have trusted Lucrezia Borgia. Still, your experience is sufficiently strange, and I am glad that your instinct has been justified. Miss Gordon, on the face of it, has proved herself a singularly able, and, I may say, a noble woman; but I must see more of her, and learn to know her better before I can rescind my former opinion—that she is not the wife for you."

"To know her is to love her," said Ellis, with deep emotion.

"Ah, you see I don't know her, therefore I cannot love her; if I did you might object. However, the main question at present is how to extricate her and Mrs Moxton from their equivocal position. Until the assassin is found, and all is made plain, Mrs Moxton dare not explain our trick to Busham or claim her property. If she did he might be dangerous."

"Can he be dangerous?"

"So far as inclination goes I should say so, but whether he has the power is another question, and one not so easily answered. However, for your satisfaction, Bob, I

can tell you that Busham is a liar. While you were at Myrtle Villa I went round to Drake at the Police Office and tried to find out if Busham had spoken to any policeman on that night. If you remember he declared that he held a long conversation with one at, or near, the station. He trusts to that for an *alibi*."

"But Drake does not know Busham; he could tell you nothing, Harry."

"Quite so, but he could tell me who was on duty on that night. I did not inform him of my reasons, save that I was curious on my own account to learn who killed Moxton, so I found out the names of the police on duty that night. Queerly enough their term of service has come round again for night duty, so I went out and questioned at least half a dozen about Busham."

"Well?" asked Ellis, impatiently.

"Well, Busham is a liar; he spoke to none of them, and none spoke to him. They never saw a gentleman of his description about on that night, so I judged that he dodged after Moxton in the shadows to avoid recognition. Now, Bob, your best plan is to see Busham and accuse him; then we shall see if he can bring forward in his defence this supposititious policeman."

"Good. I'll call on our mutual friend to-morrow. But I shall see Zirknitz first."

"What for?"

"To ask him how Busham was dressed on that night. As the police would not recognise Bush-

am by his face, they might by his dress. In that way we can learn if anyone of them saw him following Moxton after they left the railway station."

Having decided upon this course, which, under the circumstances, was the most sensible, both men retired to bed. Next morning, after a further discussion with Cass, the doctor set out for Bloomsbury. As yet he had not many patients, so he could afford the time, but his practice was increasing, and he foresaw that unless he could bring the matter of the murder to a speedy conclusion, he would be obliged to throw it over altogether. But on Janet's account he was unwilling to do this.

As usual, M. Zirknitz was still in bed, and Ellis waited for some time in the gorgeous sitting-room, which its owner—apparently—had created out of nothing. When the Austrian made his appearance he was as lively as ever, and greeted Ellis in his most genial manner.

"Ah, Ellis, *mon ami, mon cher*, so you have arrived once more. Is it to take me to a prison or to join me at *déjeuner*—the latter, I hope; friendship is so much more charming than enmity."

"I have come only to ask you a few questions, Zirknitz; also to tell you something which may astonish you."

"Astonish me! *C'est une mauvaise plaisanterie, mon cher.* I am never astonished at anything in this best of all possible worlds. You have not read *Candide*, in which that saying

occurs? No. Ah, you should. Voltaire is the most witty of his race. *Eh bien!* What is your astonishing news?"

"I know your history and that of your sisters, and I have learnt how Miss Gordon took the place of Mrs Moxton to fight her battles."

"You know that? Ah, well, Janet must have told you. If she did, she is right. Janet can do no wrong. She is the dearest and most excellent sister in the world."

"Are you the best brother to her?"

"I? *Mon ami*, I am a scamp. I have no good in me. If I had it would not be so creditable to Janet that she is fond of me. So she has told you all her intrigues. What can I do?"

"Inform me about Busham. You saw him on that night?"

"*Oui da!* He followed that poor Edgar from the station."

"How was he dressed?"

Zirknitz reflected. "It was cold that night," said he, musingly. "I put on a fur coat. Eh! Ah, yes. Busham had a coat of the same and a tall hat. I can say no more than that."

A fur-lined coat, a tall hat. This was precisely the scanty description given by Laura of her momentary glimpse of the assassin. What if the lawyer, after all, should be the guilty person? Full of excitement Ellis detailed to Zirknitz his suspicions, and cited the fact of the red pocket-book. The Austrian uttered an exclamation of astonishment on hearing that this was missing.

"Edgar, excellent Edgar, had it in his pocket at the music-hall. Eh! yes, I quite remember. He took out the book to show me a bill."

"A bill? What kind of a bill?"

"A bill of exchange or a promissory note. Now you speak, *mon cher ami*, it all comes back to me. Edgar showed me the name of his father on the bill and declared that it was forged."

"A forged bill!" said Ellis, "and in the pocket-book which was stolen? Ah, this, then, may be the motive for the crime. Zirknitz, did Moxton say who had forged the bill?"

"Eh? No. He said, 'My Rudolph, see what I got from Busham this night.'"

"Busham! Busham! Could he have forged the bill?"

"Eh? No, I think not, or he would not give it to Edgar."

"Still, a forged bill, obtained from Busham, and he followed Edgar out of the station. He wore a tall hat and a fur coat. As the assassin was dressed the same it might be— By Heavens! Zirknitz, I believe that Busham is the guilty person, after all."

Zirknitz shrugged his shoulders, but did not offer an opinion, and as the doctor did not think that there was anything further to be learnt from him, he rose to go. At the door, however, he paused, and made a chance remark which gained him greater results than any of his previous questions.

"I forgot to tell you," said Ellis, "that I have tricked Busham. He thinks that he has a claim to a portion of Mrs Moxton's pro-

perty because he destroyed the will. But what he destroyed, M. Zirknitz, was a copy made by me; the original is in my possession."

Rudolph's eyes sparkled. "Then Laura will inherit all Moxton's wealth?"

"Undoubtedly, as soon as she can claim it without risking any danger from Busham. He knows too much."

"But not as much as I know. Listen, *mon ami*. I can tell you a great deal about Busham which will help you to save Laura. Eh, yes, I will see that she gets the money of that poor Edgar."

"So that you may get a share of it, I suppose?" said Ellis, drily.

Zirknitz laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "But, certainly—Why not? I am her brother; I need money. If I help her, she must help me. Listen! *mon cher.*"

With this exordium Zirknitz poured forth into Ellis's ears a story about the lawyer and about his own treachery which at once pleased and horrified Ellis. He did not know whether most to hate or admire the scamp; but in the end he decided that it would be diplomatic to hide his feelings, and so ended his visit.

CHAPTER XX

BUSHAM AT BAY

IT was in a state of subdued excitement that Ellis left the rooms of Zirknitz. He now seemed to be nearer solving the mystery than he had ever been before. There was no doubt that Moxton

had been murdered in order to obtain the forged bill ; but Ellis was uncertain in his own mind whether Busham had actually struck the blow. A silk hat and a fur-lined coat was not a distinctive dress on a cold evening for any man—a dozen might wear it. Still, the coincidence of dress was striking. Busham might be the criminal, after all, and Ellis drove directly to Esher Lane for the purpose of satisfying himself on this point.

What the doctor particularly wished to know was, Who had forged the elder Moxton's name? If Busham had done so he would scarcely have given the bill to Edgar, who had no great love for him. To hand him over an incriminating document and then murder him to get it back again would have been the height of folly. If, therefore, Busham was innocent of the forgery, he would scarcely risk his life in endeavouring to recover the bill. Thus, if anyone had a reason to desire the death of Edgar, it must have been the forger himself. Having committed one crime he certainly would not hesitate to commit a second, if only to conceal the first. This theory was excellent, and Ellis wished to prove its truth. To do so, it was necessary that he should learn the name of the man who had forged the bill. Busham had given the document to Edgar Moxton, as was asserted by Zirknitz, therefore Busham could inform him of what he wished to know. But would he do so? Ellis, for want of experience of the man, could not answer

this question, and arrived at Esher Lane in a state of perplexity. However, his head was clear and his will determined—a most necessary frame of mind for anyone who had to deal with so crafty a creature as Busham.

The office was as dingy and dirty as ever. The lean clerks still scribbled interminable folios, and strained their eyes in the uncertain light. From the inner room came the rasping cough of Busham, which showed that he was alive and plotting. Ellis sent in his card, which was received by the lawyer with anything but pleasure. However, he did not think it wise to betray any fear of his visitor, so gave orders that he was to be admitted at once. More than that, he threw into his greeting as much cordiality as was possible with one of his detestable nature.

"I am glad to see you, doctor," said he, pointing to one of the two chairs. "That seems strange, does it not? We had a tiff last time we met here, eh? Quite so. But I never bear malice, not I. How is Mrs Moxton?"

"The true Mrs Moxton is quite well."

Busham's naturally pale face became of a greenish hue. "What do you mean with your 'true Mrs Moxton'?" he demanded, narrowing his eyes until they looked like those of a cat.

"What I say, and what you know. Janet Gordon, to fight her sister's battles, took that sister's place."

"You are well informed," sneered Busham. "On whose authority?"

"I have the best authority. Miss Gordon told me herself."

"How dare you say that I knew of this plot!" cried the lawyer, savagely. "Ridiculous! I know nothing about the sisters."

"That is a lie!" replied Ellis, coolly. "You know everything about them. For months you have been watching for an opportunity to get them into your toils."

"Who says this?"

"Rudolph Zirknitz."

"Bah! that silly fool! What does he know?"

"More than you think," retorted Ellis. "Zirknitz is a scamp, but no fool, and he told me all about the questions you had asked him. He even mentioned the sums of money you have paid him for his information."

"What information?" said Busham, fighting every inch.

"Is it necessary for me to inform you?" questioned Ellis, with icy contempt.

"What information?" repeated the lawyer.

"He told you that the supposed Mrs Moxton was really Janet Gordon. He betrayed his sisters for money like the contemptible creature he is, and in turn he has betrayed you."

"I don't understand your hint of betrayal."

"I think you do. But if you wish me to be more explicit, I can inform you that Zirknitz saw you following Moxton on that night."

Busham sneered, and his brow cleared. "So you said when Mrs Moxton—I beg your pardon—Miss Gordon was here. I then

admitted that I was at Dukesfield on that night, and gave my reasons for being there. Also, I gave an account of my actions."

"I know you did, Mr Busham. A very pretty account, which did justice to your imagination."

"I told the truth," cried Busham, gnawing his lip.

"No, you did not. You told what suited your purpose. You spoke to no policeman on that night, for those who were on duty then have all been closely questioned. You never followed Mrs Moxton to Pimlico, but you called there later and bribed the servant, Sarah, to tell you the truth."

"Who says I did?"

"Zirknitz. I am afraid you were a trifle over-confident of his silence, Mr Busham."

"Zirknitz is a liar!"

"Oh, no, only a traitor who changes sides when he sees a chance of making money."

"He won't make any out of his sisters," growled Busham. "I have burnt that will, and the Moxton property will come to me."

Ellis smiled when he thought on how slight a foundation this belief rested. "Well, we will say nothing about the will. But even though you have destroyed it, Mrs Moxton takes a great portion of her husband's property as his widow."

"She sha'n't have one penny," snarled Busham. "A jade, an adventuress and a murderer! that's what she is. If she refuses to give me the whole of the Moxton property, I'll denounce her. He! he! then she will be hanged."

"I doubt it, Busham. There is a prejudice against hanging women in this country. As to your saying that she killed Moxton, that is a lie, and you know it. The man who murdered your cousin wore a silk hat and fur coat."

"Who says so?"

"Mrs Moxton herself. She saw the man strike the blow, but could not recognise him."

"Oh, that is an invention to save her neck," scoffed Busham. "A man in a silk hat and a fur coat? Bosh! Who is the man?"

"Well, I am not quite clear on that point," replied Ellis, speaking very slowly, "but I fancied he might be you."

Busham started from his seat with a kind of screech hardly human. "I?" he gasped. "You dare to accuse me of that crime! And on what grounds?"

"You wore a similar dress on the night you followed Moxton."

"Who says I did?"

"Your dear friend, M. Zirknitz." Busham ground his teeth, and said something not precisely complimentary to the Austrian. After a time he recovered his calmness, but not his colour.

"You accuse me of murdering Moxton?" he said.

"Oh, no, I don't accuse you, I merely state that such might be the case."

"Bah! The accusation is not worth considering. What motive could I have for killing my cousin? It is true that his father altered his will at the last moment and left everything to Edgar. What

then? I had sufficient influence with him to finger that money, and I certainly intended to do so. Why should I risk my neck to upset all my plans?"

"You might have hoped to get the money after Moxton's death, or, at least, a share of it."

"Don't deceive yourself," snapped the lawyer. "I hoped for none of it. Edgar told me that, after his marriage, he had made a will leaving all to his wife. What motive, then, had I to commit so purposeless a crime? I could manage Edgar because I knew him; but I never met—I never saw Mrs Moxton, and could hope to gain no influence over her, especially with that infernal sister in the way. If she—"

"Speak more respectfully of Miss Gordon," interrupted the doctor, angrily. "She is my friend, and I will not permit a word against her. You say that Mrs Moxton killed her husband. Prove it!"

"She was always quarrelling with him," replied Busham, sullenly. "I know that for a fact, because Edgar told me so. He said that he was afraid of his wife, that she frequently threatened him with the carving-knife. When I heard of the murder next morning I went down to see Mrs Moxton, as I was certain she had killed Edgar. As I walked up the garden I saw the flash of steel in a laurel bush, and on going to it I found a knife stuck in one of the branches. It was a carving-knife, and there was blood on the blade and the handle. I was certain then that Mrs Moxton

was guilty, but having my own ends to gain I did not denounce her then, but simply slipped the knife up my sleeve and went away. I produced it, as you saw, to make Miss Gordon — for, thanks to Zirknitz, I knew my visitor was not Mrs Moxton — give up the will. She made the exchange and took away the knife. I burnt the will as you saw, and by destroying it could hope to get a portion of the property. Now I mean to have the whole, or else I shall denounce Mrs Moxton."

"I don't think you'll do that, Busham, for I shall then state that you committed a felony by burning the will. No, no ; whatever happens you can't afford to denounce Mrs Moxton. You might frighten her, and, perhaps — as she is only a woman — Miss Gordon, but you can't frighten me. As to your finding of the knife, Mrs Moxton threw it into the laurel bush after the murder, but she did not use it."

"You will find it difficult to prove that," snarled Busham, beginning to feel beaten. "If she did not use it, who did?"

"The man in the fur coat, who snatched it from her when she was in her husband's grip."

"And who is the man in the fur coat?"

"I think you know, Busham."

"Indeed, I don't, confound you!"

"At least you know the name of the man who endorsed that bill."

With a gasp the lawyer started out of his chair.

"Bill? What bill?"

"The forged bill which you gave to Moxton at the Merryman Music-Hall on the night of the murder."

"I gave no bill. I know of none."

"Oh, yes, you do. Moxton showed the bill to Zirknitz and told him that it was forged on his father. It was placed in a red pocket-book, Mr Busham, and that pocket-book was stolen from the corpse."

"Lies! Lies! All lies!" raved Busham, stamping. "I know nothing of any bill! I don't know who killed Moxton!"

Ellis did not waste words, but rising to his feet glanced at his watch with a calm air. "I must go now," said he. "I shall give you five days to tell the truth, Mr Busham. Failing that, I shall place the whole matter in the hands of the police, and re-open the case. Good-day, sir ;" and with that last warning Ellis walked out of the room.

With a white face and a haggard expression, Busham sat for an hour or more in his chair. Twice one of his clerks opened the door and looked in, but awed by the expression of terror in the lawyer's eyes, withdrew. At last Busham wiped his brow, which was beaded with perspiration, and rose to his feet. "Shall I fly or stay?" he asked himself; then, bringing down his fist on the table, he cried: "No, by Heaven! I'll stay and fight it out!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE BLIND GIRL

IN compliment to the great poet of his nation, Herr Schwartz dignified his English home with the name of Goethe Cottage. It was a one-storied house of no great size, built somewhat in the style of a bungalow, and standing in a fairly large garden, at the bottom of a rural *cul-de-sac*, termed Alma Road. Shortly after his visit to the lawyer, Dr Ellis called at this place, and having advised Schwartz of his coming, found the German and Captain Garret awaiting his arrival. So eager were they to welcome him that they appeared at the gate before the bell ceased to jingle.

"Mine goot doctor," cried Schwartz, beaming, with outstretched hands, "you haf gome at last to zee boor liddle Hilda!"

"Glad to see you, Dr Ellis," said Garret, jerking out his words in abrupt military style. "We have long expected your visit. Come in."

The three walked towards the house through a theatrical-looking garden, with many coloured glass balls ranged on squat pedestals along the borders of the flower-beds. There was also a tiny fountain, in which a small Triton spouted a smaller stream of water out of a conch-shell, an arbour fiery red with Virginia creeper, and wide walks of white pebbles, which threw back a glare, even under the pale rays of the late autumn sun. The house was

surrounded by a wide verandah with gaily-striped red and white sun-blinds, cane lounging-chairs and marble-topped iron tables. Within, Ellis found the place luxuriously furnished, but also theatrical in taste, and he was shown into a drawing-room where intrusive colours of scarlet and magenta inflicted torture on a sensitive eye. Schwartz had money and a love of comfort; but the complacent way in which he looked round this terrible apartment showed that he was absolutely without the artistic sense. A woman might have softened the general glaring effect of the room; but the only woman in the house was blind, and could have no idea of the crude, ill-matched colouring by which she was surrounded.

When they sat down Ellis looked at his companions, and was astonished how ill Schwartz appeared to be. Garret, as formerly, was haggard, lean and gentlemanly, with the same military bearing and bored expression. Evidently he was a man who had, as the saying is, "gone the pace," and now, in his middle age—he was between forty and fifty—lacked vitality and zest. As usual he was carefully dressed, and looked eminently well-bred and well-groomed beside his patron and friend. Schwartz himself was less complacent and jolly, also he was lean in comparison with his former portly figure, and his clothes hung loosely on his limbs. Instead of his face being smooth and red, it was now pallid and wrinkled, and although he attemp-

ted to be his usual happy self, the attempt was an obvious effort. Occasionally he stole a troubled glance at the Captain, but that gentleman hardly looked at him, and manifested supreme indifference. Only when the conversation had to do with Hilda did he wake up and take any interest in what was going on.

"You are not looking well yourself, Herr Schwartz," said Ellis, when the trio were seated and refreshments had been produced by the hospitable German.

"Ach! I am ferry vell," replied Schwartz hastily. "The hot dimes of the zun haf made me thin, and I haf moch thinking apout the liddle Hilda."

"Oh, you must keep up your spirits about that. I may be able to restore her sight. Was she born blind?"

"No," interposed Garret. "Took notice like other children for a few weeks, but afterwards the sight went. Do you think you can cure her?"

"I must make an examination first. It is impossible for me to give an opinion before then."

"Das is right, doctor. You vill zee the liddle Hilda at vonce. I would gif all my moneys if you could make her zee."

"You are very fond of her, Herr Schwartz?"

Tears came into the German's eyes, for after the manner of his nation he was emotional and sentimental and easily touched. "The liddle Hilda is the light of mine life," he said, in tones of deep feeling. "I haf lofed her for years, and she is to me mine

own child. I am her zecond vater."

"Father and mother and everything else," jerked Garret. "Much better than a scamp like me."

"No, no," protested Schwartz, but with a ring of insincerity in his voice, which Ellis at once detected. "You are a goot man, mein frind."

"Can I see Miss Garret now?"

"Dis ferry moment," cried the German, getting up in a violent hurry. "Will you gome with me, doctor? And you, Garret?"

"I shall stay here, Schwartz. Better have as few in the room as possible, or Hilda will be nervous."

"Ach! is dat zo? Then I vill not sday. Gome, doctor."

The room at the back of the house, into which Schwartz introduced Ellis, was like a fairy palace. A large, airy, high-roofed apartment, decked and furnished with rainbow hues. Chinese paper of the willow-plate pattern figured on the walls, curtains blue as a midsummer sky draped the French windows, the carpet was of the same cerulean tint, and the furniture was upholstered in azure and white. Hothouse flowers were placed in every corner, there was a grand piano, and many birds in gilded cages made the room re-echo with tuneful strains. The windows were many and large, admitting ample light, and looking out on to a velvet lawn bounded by a tall hedge of laurel. Ellis had never seen a more pretty or cheerful apartment, and felt sad at the irony which placed amidst all this beauty and light so attractive to the eye a blind girl. She

was seated at the piano when they entered, but rose when she heard the door open.

Hilda Garret was tall for her age, in spite of the tender diminutive bestowed on her by Schwartz. Her face was as pale as marble, and as beautiful as that of the Venus de Medici. Indeed, in her white robe, with pallid face and still looks, she was not unlike a statue. The lack of eyesight took away all expression, and she lived and moved in a world of shadows. Ellis was profoundly touched by her beauty and helplessness, and by the tender little cry she uttered when Schwartz took her hand.

"Mine lofely laty, I haf brought Dr Ellis to zee you. He is mine goot friend, and glever. He vill mak you to zee, mine heart."

"Oh, doctor," said Hilda, clasping her hands, and speaking in a low, but musical voice, "can you give me back my sight?"

"That I cannot say as yet," replied Ellis. "I cannot perform miracles. If your sight can be restored, I hope to restore it. But I must first ask you a few questions and examine your eyes."

"Aha! I vill go away."

"No, no, papa, you must stay. I wish my father would come in also. I want him to hold my hand and give me courage."

"Zo!" replied Schwartz, with a sad expression at this preference. "Vait, mine liddle Hilda, I vill pring your vater to you."

Hilda nodded and a charming smile overspread her pale face. When Schwartz left the room she asked Ellis to let her pass her

hand over his face, as she wished to know his looks. Ellis readily consented, and Hilda, with the delicate touch of the blind, ran her fingers over his features. "You are nice-looking," she said naively, when this was done. "I like nice-looking people."

"Thank you," answered Ellis, laughing. "I am obliged for the compliment, Miss Garret. And now I must ask you a few questions."

To this Hilda readily consented. It is not necessary to set forth the conversation or examination *in extenso*, as the questions were purely technical.

Captain Garret entered, and held Hilda's hand while Ellis made an examination of her eyes. This took some time, but was unsatisfactory, as Ellis could not bring himself to pronounce an opinion. Privately he thought that he could cure the cataract by an operation; but lacking the self-confidence which a great man should have, he hesitated to express his private views.

"I must make another examination," he said, after an exhaustive conversation, "before I can commit myself to an opinion. Yet I think I can give you some hope."

"Oh, father!" Hilda uttered the words in a thrilling voice, and Ellis glanced at Captain Garret. He did not look pleased; indeed he frowned and withdrew his hand from that of his daughter. It occurred to Ellis that the Captain did not wish Hilda to regain her sight. The expression of anger was only a flash, but Ellis saw it,

and gained the above impression. Had Schwartz been in the room, the Captain might have controlled himself better, but Schwartz had not returned after Hilda's cry for her father. Even on his short acquaintance, Ellis could not but think how the good German must have suffered from his voluntary exclusion from his darling. However, Garret said nothing at the moment, and the doctor addressed himself to Hilda.

"I shall come and see you in two or three days," he said. "But you must keep yourself cheerful and not mope. Have you no companion?"

"Schwartz and myself," put in Garret.

"I mean no female companion?"

"Janet Gordon comes to see me sometimes," said Hilda. "I am very fond of her. She is so kind and good. I wish she would come again."

"She shall come again, Miss Garret. I will speak to her myself."

Garret uttered an exclamation. "Do you know her, doctor?"

"Very well. She is staying at Myrtle Villa with her sister, Mrs Moxton."

"H'm!" said the Captain, with a glance at Hilda. "I don't know if Schwartz will like her to come here again."

"Why not?"

"I will tell you outside, or perhaps Schwartz will tell you himself."

"But I want Janet to come," cried Hilda, piteously. "I love her!"

Again the flash of anger passed

over Garret's face, but he only patted her hand softly. "If Schwartz permits her to come, she shall come," he said; "and now, doctor, we had better go."

"I think so. Good-bye, Miss Garret. I may be able to cure you, and if you want Miss Gordon, you shall have her for a companion."

"Thank you, doctor, thank you," and as they left the room Hilda began to play a triumphal march on the piano. The words of Ellis had inspired her with hope and confidence.

Captain Garret immediately addressed the doctor when they left the room. "I could not speak to you plainly, in there," he said abruptly, "but I have the strongest objection to Miss Gordon coming here."

"On account of the murder?"

"Yes. Hilda knows nothing of that, therefore I did not explain. If Miss Gordon is her companion, she may hear of the crime; and think of the shock it would be to her delicate nerves!"

"She will never hear anything of the crime from Miss Gordon. That lady is most discreet."

"She is clever, I don't deny, doctor—too clever, in my opinion. But she is shady. She sold programmes at the Merryman Music-Hall; she is not the kind of companion I should choose for my daughter."

This came well from Captain Garret, who had been cashiered for cheating, who lived on another man's money, and who was an out-and-out adventurer. Ellis felt such a contempt for him that

he did not argue the question. "Let us hear what Herr Schwartz has to say," he said.

"Schwartz will be of my opinion," said the Captain, gravely.

But here, it appeared, Garret was wrong. Schwartz listened attentively to the recommendation of Ellis that Miss Gordon should be brought to Goethe Cottage as a companion for Hilda. His face grew a shade paler to the doctor's attentive eye, and he appeared to be uneasy. After a sharp glance at Ellis, he made up his mind and spoke it.

"Miss Corton shall gome!" he declared decisively.

"Schwartz!" said Garret, in a warning tone, whereat the usually placid German flew into a rage.

"I say she shall gome!" he cried, in his deepest tones. "Chanet is a goot girl; she vill not dalk of murders and wickednesses. She is glever!"

Garret muttered something not precisely complimentary to Janet, and turned away. The German looked after him with an anxious expression; but finally turned to Ellis with a look of relief. "Dell Chanet to gome," he said, "but she must zay notings of the murders."

"I'll answer for her there," said Ellis, cheerfully.

"And you can make right the liddle Hilda?"

"I think so; but I can answer you for certain next time I come. I shall bring Miss Gordon with me," and so, in spite of Captain Garret, it was arranged.

CHAPTER XXII

[JANET'S DISCOVERY

ON leaving Goethe Cottage, Ellis jumped on his bicycle, and was soon spinning along the country roads which connected rural Parkmere with the more urban suburb of Dukesfield. Usually Ellis enjoyed the exhilaration of riding and the pleasure of admiring the scenery; but on this occasion, beyond the necessary guidance of his machine, he was preoccupied. It seemed strange to him that Garret should so strongly object to Janet as a companion for his daughter. The Captain was a supremely selfish man, as selfish in every way as Zirknitz, and more vicious. He was indifferent to his daughter, save that he looked upon her as a necessary link to bind him to Schwartz. Schwartz was clever and generous, and devoted to Hilda; he had plenty of money, and Garret, the idle and dissipated, could not do without him. For the furtherance of his plans, he usually let Schwartz manage Hilda, and Hilda's business, as he pleased. It was, therefore, surprising that he should have taken so unusual a step as to object to Miss Gordon.

"Garret and Schwartz can have nothing to do with the murder!" mused Ellis; "they knew Moxton only slightly, and they had no motive to get rid of him. Indeed, his untimely death has lost Schwartz a good customer to his gambling table, if that exists, as is reported; at anyrate, an as-

sidious attendant at his music-hall. Garret was anxious on Schwartz's account, hence he warned him not to have Janet in the house. He thinks she is too clever; perhaps he fancies she may learn too much. I am too fanciful—too suspicious. Yet Garret certainly mentioned the murder. What is best to be done? Janet must go to Goethe Cottage to keep Hilda cheerful; but shall I tell her of the objections—or this discussion? No, I will not bias her in any way. If there is anything to be found out, she shall discover it herself."

To this wise determination Ellis adhered. On seeing Janet that evening, he merely informed her that Hilda was mopish, and that he wished her to cheer the girl. Janet readily consented to this.

"I am very fond of Hilda," she said earnestly; "and you may be sure I shall do what I can. Does Mr Schwartz want me to come?"

"Very much. Tell me, Miss Gordon, what is your opinion of him?"

"I think he is a good man, doctor. Several times I have been under the necessity of testing his kindness of heart, and it has never failed me. Then look how good he is to poor Hilda. If she depended upon that selfish father of hers, how wretched she would be."

"Yet she appears to be more attached to her father than to Schwartz."

"I daresay," said Janet, somewhat cynically; "it is that frame of mind which created the proverb about virtue being its own reward.

People who do most are thought least of, and it is your selfish person who gets all the love and praise. Look at my own case. All my life I have put myself aside for Rudolph and Laura; yet they think nothing of me."

"They say they do."

"Mere lip-service!" exclaimed Miss Gordon; "they would not do me a good turn however little trouble it might be. Laura is grateful to me now, because she is yet in danger, and I stand by her; but when all is well, she will think nothing of my services. As for Rudolph, he would borrow my last sixpence, and see me dying of starvation without returning so much as a single penny. Oh, I am under no disillusion about my own folk, doctor! What I do, I do from a sense of duty."

"With regard to your sister I can say nothing, Miss Gordon, as I do not know her sufficiently well; but Zirknitz—well, he is a thoroughly bad lot, and would sell his nearest and dearest at a price."

Janet demurred. "I cannot believe that he is so wicked as that!"

"But he is, and he proved it to me only the other day. He told Busham all about your impersonation of Mrs Moxton; betrayed all your schemes and plans while you were fighting single-handed against overwhelming odds; and this because Busham paid him. Now, thinking Mrs Moxton will recover her husband's fortune—for I told him that the real will still existed—he has betrayed all Busham's secret doings

to me. What do you think of him now?"

"He is a scoundrel! I will never speak to him again. Oh, doctor, if you only knew what I have done for that man. I knew he was heartless and selfish, but I did not think he was wicked."

"Heartlessness and selfishness usually terminate in wickedness," said Ellis, sententiously. "However, one good result has come out of his evil ways. I have learnt all about Mr Busham's intrigues, and I have given him a few days to own up."

"That he killed Edgar?" asked Janet, breathlessly.

"No, he did not kill him—at least, I don't think so. But I have insisted upon his revealing the name of the assassin, as I am certain he knows it. In another three days he must tell the truth, or I shall place the matter in the hands of the police."

"Oh! but, Laura; she will be arrested."

"No! I do this to save her from arrest. Busham knows nothing about the false will, because I do not wish to drive him into a corner by telling him how he has been tricked. But he might learn the truth from Zirknitz, to whom it had to be told, that I might learn his true attitude in this matter. If he does learn it he will have Mrs Moxton arrested. Only by a threat against himself could I keep him in hand."

"What do you think he will do?"

"Ah! that I can't say. I know much, but not all; and the smallest amount of ignorance in any

matter is a bar to giving a reasonable opinion on it. However, Time works for me, and I shall be able to defend Mrs Moxton from her enemies. Go to Goethe Cottage, Miss Gordon, and cheer Hilda."

"Do you think you can give her back her sight?"

"Perhaps! It is a difficult case. I shall have to make another examination before I can arrive at any conclusion. In the meantime, I wish her to be lively and gay; so you must realise that wish."

"Alas!" said Janet, with a melancholy smile, "I have too much experience of the world to be gay. However, I will do my best."

It will be seen from this last observation that Janet was rapidly coming under the influence of Ellis. She was a clever woman and, in her own way, masterful; therefore, on finding someone stronger than herself, she was prepared to obey him. This sounds paradoxical, but it is so, especially in the relations of sex. A woman must always succumb to a man, if he be a man; obedience is in the feminine blood, notwithstanding the New Woman. Janet knew from experience that Ellis was kind and generous, and was willing to help to the extent of his powers those in whom he believed; now his duel with Busham—no mean adversary—had given her an impression of his strength. Moreover, she loved him, and perhaps this was why she obeyed him without a struggle. She felt the happier for such obedience, although it was new to her,

When a woman finds her master in an honourable, generous, kindly man, her happiness is assured.

Therefore, Janet went to Goethe Cottage, and was welcomed by Hilda with enthusiasm. The girl was fond of her, and loved to be in such pleasant company. Warned by Schwartz, Janet was careful to avoid the theme of the murder, and indulged Hilda in the light gossip of the day, culled from society papers. She talked of literature to the girl, and read aloud to her; she played and sang, and made herself agreeable in all ways, so that Hilda became merry and happy in spite of her blindness. On the occasion of Janet's first visit, Captain Garret hung about in a nervous manner, as though he expected some catastrophe to occur. But as the sole result of Janet's presence was to make Hilda laugh, the Captain did not appear when she called again the next day. What he dreaded, Janet could not conjecture.

The second visit was merely a repetition of the first, but had in the end a far-reaching result. Hilda chattered, and sang, and talked to her birds, and fluttered about the room like a bird herself. She never made a mistake, she never stumbled or hesitated; the limits of the apartment, the disposition of the furniture, were known to her as well as though she had eyesight. Janet, watching her gyrations, could not forbear making a remark to that effect.

"Upon my word, Hilda, one would think you had eyes!"

"Oh, I know this room and my bedroom so well," chattered the blind girl. "I have been here for nearly two years, you know. But the rest of the house is like the centre of Africa to me." She paused, with a childish smile, and clapped her hands. "Let us go over it," she said.

"Certainly, if you wish. But what good will that do?"

"I want to know how the rooms are furnished. You shall take my hand, and lead me through them, describing everything that you see. Then I shall astonish Papa Schwartz and my father when they come home."

"I suppose they will have no objection?" said Janet, hesitating.

"Of course not. Papa Schwartz said that I could go anywhere so long as a friend was with me. I stay in this room because I know it from experience; and I might go wrong did I leave it. But I am not afraid to explore the house with you, dear Janet. You shall be my eyes. Come, let us start on our expedition."

Seeing no harm in this innocent proposal, Janet assented to it as a means of amusing Hilda. Hand in hand the two girls walked into the drawing-room, which Janet described in all its hideous colouring. Hilda was shocked.

"Magenta and scarlet," she said; "it sounds dreadful!"

"But you know nothing of colours, Hilda!"

"No, but my dressmaker does. And she said that magenta and scarlet were ugly. I can't imagine them myself. She saw the

drawing-room, and I merely re-echoed her opinion. What is scarlet like, Janet?"

"It is a bright red."

"But what is red like?"

Janet was puzzled. She did not know how to describe the colour to one who had no conception of tint. "Red is—red," she said at length. "I can say no more. Let us go into the dining-room, Hilda."

The *salon* proved to be less glaring than the drawing-room, being papered and curtained and upholstered in dark green. The windows were few and filled with stained glass, so that the general effect was gloomy. In spite of her blindness, Hilda felt this.

"I don't like this room, it is dark," she said abruptly. "Come away, Janet."

"How do you know it is dark?" questioned Janet, as they went out.

"I cannot say. I feel happy in my own sitting-room, because I know it is bright; but here I feel wretched. I can give you no reason. But is it not curious, Janet? I can always tell dark stuff from light. I get a pain in my fingers when I touch anything black."

"Nonsense, Hilda!"

"Well, I can't describe my feelings any better to you. One has to be blind to understand these things. Where are we now, Janet?"

"In Mr Schwartz's study. It is decorated in dark red."

"Dark again!" Hilda shuddered. "I don't like dark. Where is the desk?"

"Just before the window, where the light falls strongest."

"Lead me to it, Janet."

Janet obeyed, and Hilda ran her fingers along the top of the desk. Then she made a discovery. "Papa has left his keys," she cried. "Now, I shall open all the drawers and take away the keys, just to punish him for being careless."

"Oh, Hilda, don't do that. He might not like it."

"Yes, he will. Papa Schwartz is never angry at what I do."

"The more reason not to abuse his kindness."

"How severe you are!" cried Hilda, with a pout. "Well, I shall leave the keys, but I shall open the drawers. After all, Janet, as I am blind I cannot see his secrets."

Janet laughed, but as what Hilda said was true, she made no further opposition. While the blind girl was opening the drawers one after the other, Janet walked to the other end of the room to look at some pictures. She was recalled by a joyous laugh from Hilda, and returned to find all the drawers open. Janet took the keys from her with gentle force.

"My dear, Mr Schwartz will not be pleased. We must close these again."

"Oh, very well," said Hilda, carelessly. "I was only joking. Close them again, Janet."

This Miss Gordon was already doing. She closed and locked the top drawers without looking much at their contents. In the bottom right-hand drawer, how-

ever, she made a discovery which amazed her. On the top of other articles she saw the red pocket-book.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

"HAVE you finished locking the drawers, Janet?" asked Hilda, impatiently.

But Janet did not answer. In a tumult of emotion she was staring at the red pocket-book. There it lay in the drawer, carelessly thrust in with loose papers and old letters. No attempt had been made to hide it. No doubt the drawer was locked, and but for Hilda's freak would have been opened by no one but its owner. Schwartz had not thought it necessary to conceal the book more completely. At once it flashed into Janet's mind that the German had murdered Edgar, since no one but the murderer could have become possessed of the pocket-book. In the meantime Hilda, uneasy at Janet's silence, repeated the question.

"I am just locking the last drawer," replied Janet, and, swiftly making up her mind to risk the consequences, she snatched up the red book and slipped it into her pocket. For her sister's sake it was necessary to get this evidence into her possession. Having accomplished this she locked the drawer, restored the keys to their place on the desk, and led Hilda out of the room. Towards the blind girl it was necessary to adopt a cheerful demeanour lest

she should suspect that something was wrong. But Janet found this no easy task.

"Hilda, my dear," she said, as they returned to the blue sitting-room, "I have locked the drawers and replaced the keys, so Mr Schwartz will not guess that his desk has been open. If I were you I would not tell him; he might be vexed."

The blind girl pouted. She did not like her jest to be passed over in silence.

"Papa Schwartz is never cross with me, Janet."

"No, but he will be vexed."

"Then I shall say nothing. I would not vex him for the world. He is very good to me, almost as good as father."

"You are extremely fond of your father, Hilda!"

"I worship him," said the girl, with the exaggerated emotion of youth. "He is the best man in the world. Oh, there is no one like my father."

Privately Janet thought this was just as well, as she had no very great opinion of Captain Garret. But, bad as he was, she doubted whether he would have committed murder as Schwartz had done. It was, indeed, amazing that the German should become a criminal; for, although Janet knew well that his character was not above reproach, yet she had always thought him a good man. It was a shock to her to find that she had been so deceived. Schwartz, who had been her good friend and benefactor, was a secret assassin. Janet could not blind herself to that terrible fact.

"Now we must have some tea," said the unsuspecting Hilda.

Under the circumstances it was an ordeal to sit at the table and eat and drink with pretended carelessness. But Janet bent her strong will to accomplish the purpose of keeping Hilda in ignorance. The expression on her face, the frown on her brow, mattered little as Hilda was blind, but Janet carefully controlled her voice so that nothing unusual might be noticed. In this she succeeded admirably, and deceived Hilda so well that, when taking her leave, the girl had no thought that anything was wrong.

"Come again soon, dear," she said, embracing Janet warmly. "You are such a comfort to me."

Self-controlled to the end, Janet touched Hilda's cheek with her lips, and took her leave after a few words of farewell delivered in a steady voice. But on finding herself alone, she felt so anxious and distraught and horrified by her discovery, that but for the fresh air she would have fainted. As it was she did not take the Dukesfield 'bus as usual, but worked off her agitation by walking. Since the discovery of the pocket-book in Schwartz's private desk, she firmly believed that he was the criminal. In the autumn and winter he almost always wore a fur-lined coat over his evening dress, and to complete his costume, in accordance with the demands of fashion, a silk hat. Then he lived at Parkmere, and it was easy for him to walk to Goethe Cottage after committing the murder. But Janet was puzzled

to find a reason for the perpetration of the crime. She knew nothing about the forged bill, as Ellis had not informed her in detail of his interview with Busham. Still, Janet knew the businesslike habits of Schwartz too well to think that he did anything without a motive, and she could not conjecture that for which he had stained his hands and risked his neck.

Full of these thoughts, Miss Gordon walked all the way to Dukesfield, no inconsiderable distance, and before seeking Myrtle Villa called on Ellis to explain her discovery. Mrs Basket—who still believed that Janet was Mrs Moxton—received her with the usual show of false kindness, but announced that Dr Ellis was absent. "Though Mr Cass is in the sitting-room," finished the fat landlady.

"Mr Cass will do. Let me see him."

Harry was rather amazed to receive Janet, whom he had not seen—at all events, to speak to—since the night of the murder.

"Mrs Basket announced you as Mrs Moxton," he said with some hesitation; "but, Ellis tells me, you are Miss Gordon?"

"Yes I am Miss Gordon. But there is no need to let that tattling woman know the truth, she would only make mischief. Dr Ellis is away?"

"Just went out ten minutes ago to see a patient. I expect him back in an hour."

"I cannot wait," said Janet, feverishly. "My sister will want me. You will do, Mr Cass. Dr

Ellis informed me that you knew all about this business."

"I know everything, Miss Gordon. Anything I can do—"

"Did Dr Ellis tell you about the red pocket-book?"

"Yes. You say it was taken from the dead body. What of it?"

Janet took the book out of her pocket and placed it on the table. "There it is," she said triumphantly. "All the papers have been taken out of it. But that is the pocket-book which the murderer stole from the corpse."

"Great Heavens! How did it come into your possession?"

"I found it by chance in the desk of Herr Schwartz."

Cass started. "Do you mean to say that Schwartz is the murderer?"

"I do. If he is not, how could he become possessed of that book?"

"It is strong circumstantial evidence certainly," said Cass, after a pause. "But Schwartz—it is incredible! I always considered him such a good fellow."

"He is, he is," said Janet with emotion. "He has been a good friend to me. I can't conceive him guilty. Even if he is, I do not wish him punished. Let him write out a confession exonerating my sister, that is all I want."

"If he does that he puts the rope round his own neck, Miss Gordon. If your sister is to be exonerated and saved from the malignity of Busham, the confession would have to be made public."

"Then what is to be done?"

"I cannot say at present. If you will leave the pocket-book to me I will speak to Ellis, and we can come to some decision."

"Certainly I will give you the book," said Janet, rising. "I have every confidence in you and Dr Ellis."

"Thank you. Would you mind explaining precisely how you came into possession of the pocket-book?"

"Not at all," said Janet, and she related, in a concise manner, how Hilda's prank with the desk had led to the discovery of the book.

Having given Cass all possible information, and answered all possible questions, Janet, tired out with her emotions, and with the unusual exercise, took her leave. Cass accompanied her to the door, and promised to inform her of all that should happen in connection with this new piece of evidence. Somewhat relieved, Janet went home to Myrtle Villa.

Immediately on the doctor's return, Cass showed him the pocket-book, and repeated Janet's story. Ellis, naturally enough, was as surprised as his friend, and discussed the matter with him at length. Finally, it was decided that Ellis should see Schwartz that same evening, and hear what he had to say for himself. Owing to the exigencies of his profession as critic, Harry could not accompany his friend. The doctor was not sorry, as he thought that he could get more out of Schwartz when alone with him than in the presence of a third person. He did not take the pocket-book with

him lest it should be lost, for Schwartz was a determined man to deal with. As yet Ellis could hardly credit that he was guilty, and in spite of the damning evidence found by Janet he postponed making up his mind until he heard what the German had to say for himself. In this frame of mind he started for the Merryman Music-Hall.

Schwartz was in his private room, and as Ellis had purposely arrived rather late he was at leisure at the time. So effusively did he welcome Ellis that the doctor felt almost ashamed of his errand, but, bracing himself up with the idea that Schwartz, if not the actual criminal, yet knew something about the crime, he managed to appear sufficiently stern. To the German's eager inquiries about Hilda's health and Hilda's eyesight he gave brief and monosyllabic replies. At last Schwartz was forced to take notice of his visitor's unfriendly attitude.

"What is not right, doctor?" he asked anxiously.

Ellis glanced round to see that the door was closed, and cleared his throat.

"Mr Schwartz," he said in low tones, "I have come to see you about a very unpleasant business."

The German turned paler even than he was, and his hand shook as he tried to light a cigar. "Ach! Is dat zo?"

"It is about Moxton's murder."

"Vell, vell, what apout ze murder?" queried Schwartz, impatiently.

"I should rather put that

question to you, Schwartz. Why was Moxton murdered—or rather, why was he got out of the way?"

Instead of answering his question, Schwartz, in a tremor of nervous excitement, rose and locked the door. "Can you speak German?" he asked, in his own tongue, on returning to his seat.

"A little. I can speak it slowly."

"Then put your questions in that language," said Schwartz, savagely. "I can see that you have come to accuse me of being mixed up in this crime. Was it for this purpose that you called at my house?"

"You forget. I called at your request, to see Miss Garret."

Schwartz sighed. "Ach! the liddle Hilda," he said in English; then slipping back into his own tongue, he demanded what Ellis wished to know.

"I wish to know if you can tell me the reason Moxton was murdered?" said Ellis, slowly, in German.

"No, I cannot. I know nothing about it."

"Then I must tell you—that is, I must refresh your memory. Moxton was murdered by a man who wished to obtain possession of a forged bill."

The German bit his cigar through, and a portion fell on the floor. "I know nothing of any forged bill," he said angrily.

"That bill," resumed Ellis, calmly, "was placed by Moxton in a red pocket-book." Here Schwartz started and groaned. "Zirknitz saw him put it there. When the clothes of the corpse were examined, that pocket-book

was missing ; and strange to say, Mr Schwartz, it was found to-day in your desk at Goethe Cottage."

"In my desk !" gasped the man. "Who—who found it there ?"

"Miss Gordon. For a jest, Miss Garret opened all the drawers of your desk, because you were foolish enough to leave your keys behind. Miss Gordon closed them again. In the lowest drawer she saw and recognised the pocket-book of her brother-in-law. That book is now in her possession—or rather, in mine, as she gave it to me."

There was silence for a few moments, and Schwartz breathed heavily. "What do you want me to do ?" he said sullenly.

"Confess your guilt."

"And if I do—what then ?"

"Then you must write out and sign a confession as to how you killed Edgar Moxton, and why."

"To hang myself, I suppose ?" said Schwartz, who was growing alarmingly red in the face.

"No ; Miss Gordon is too much indebted to you to wish for your death. Write the confession, and then fly from England. Thus Mrs Moxton will be exonerated, and you will be safe."

"Ach ! it is goot of Chanet," said Schwartz, thickly ; "it is—it is—ah—ah !" He tried to rise from his seat, but suddenly gave a choking cry, and fell back, purple in the face, with staring eyes and foam on his lips.

Ellis rapidly unloosened the old man's cravat, tore off his collar, and threw open the door.

"Come here, someone," he cried. "Herr Schwartz is in a fit !"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE TRUTH

WHEN Schwartz recovered from the fit, he was taken home in a cab, and for the time being Ellis saw no more of him. He was really puzzled how to act, for the man was evidently guilty, as he had not denied the crime. For the sake of Janet, who had received benefits at the hands of Schwartz, the doctor did not wish to denounce him to the police. If he left behind him a written confession exonerating Mrs Moxton, Ellis was quite content that he should seek safety in flight. Certainly he had murdered a man, and although his victim was a worthless scoundrel, still there was no excuse to be made for so heinous a crime. But would hanging Schwartz do any good ? Ellis thought not, neither did Cass, nor Janet.

"If it was Busham," said Harry, "I would see him swing with the greatest pleasure, for he is a thoroughly bad lot ; but Schwartz has so many good qualities that I should like to give him a chance of repentance."

"And the crime was not committed deliberately," chimed in Janet. "I feel sure that Mr Schwartz did not come to Dukesfield with the intention of murdering Edgar. No doubt he wanted that forged bill, and hoped to rob Edgar while he was drunk. It was seeing the carving-knife in Laura's hand which made him a criminal. Temptation was put in

his way, and he snatched at it almost without thinking. Under these circumstances, and because he has been kind to me, I should like him to escape."

"He can take his own chance of that," said Ellis; "but to counter-plot Busham, it is necessary to get a full confession from Schwartz."

"But he may go away without making any confession, Bob!"

"I don't think so. Not until he is in absolute peril of his life will he leave his idol, Hilda. Besides, I called at Goethe Cottage, and he is still ill after his fit."

"Did you see him, doctor?"

"No, he refused to see me, being engaged with Garret. But I saw Hilda, and she is lamenting your absence, Miss Gordon."

"I cannot go round to the cottage now," said Janet, with a mournful shake of her head. "Mr Schwartz thinks that I have been a spy and ungrateful."

"Indeed you wrong him," said Ellis, quickly. "He was much touched when I told him that you did not wish the police to be told. He would have said more about it, only he fell into the fit."

This conversation took place in Ellis's sitting-room on the evening of the day following Janet's discovery of the pocket-book. Schwartz was still ill, and, as Ellis said, would see no one. The three—Cass, Ellis and Janet—were now anxiously discussing what was best to be done. They wanted to thwart Busham, to save Mrs Moxton and to spare Schwartz; but none of these three

things were easy to do. Since Ellis had given his ultimatum to the lawyer, nothing had been heard from Esher Lane. Janet was inclined to think that Busham, afraid of being implicated in the crime, had fled; but Cass and Ellis were satisfied that the man, with his grasping, foxy, intriguing nature, would stay and face the matter until his personal safety was promised. While they were discussing this point, the door opened abruptly, and Busham himself entered the room. It was a case of "Talk of the Devil and you will see his hoof." The trio were completely taken by surprise at his unlooked-for appearance and his insolent entry.

"He! he!" sniggered Busham, who had all his natural impudence about him. "I just looked in to see Dr Ellis, and I find company. How do you do, Miss Gordon, or Mrs Moxton—which?"

"I am Janet Gordon, Mr Busham! I think you know that."

"Indeed, I do not, dear lady. You are one of twins, remember—a kind of double-face female, Janus, eh?"

"Cease your insolence, man!" said Ellis, angrily, "and tell me how dare you walk into my room without knocking?"

"Oh, I informed your landlady that I was an old friend of yours, so she let me pass. She looks a fool, doctor. You don't offer me a seat. Well, I will anticipate your hospitality and take one. And who is this gentleman?"

"My name is Cass. I am a journalist," said Harry, enraged at the man's impudence. "What

the deuce do you come here for?"

"Not to see you, my dear sir. My business is with Dr Ellis, and possibly with Miss Gordon."

"Have you come to confess?" asked Janet, quietly.

"Confess! I have nothing to confess. I come here to make a proposal."

Ellis shrugged his shoulders. "You have brass enough for anything, I think," said he. "Well, Mr Busham, and what is your proposal?"

"Let Mrs Moxton surrender all my uncle's property to me. Now that Edgar is dead, I am his rightful heir, being his nephew, and nearest of kin. I destroyed the will—I don't mind admitting it, because Mrs Moxton is in my power, and it is my place to make terms, not to be dictated to. Well, then, as the will is burnt, I take a portion of the property as next-of-kin; but that will not satisfy me. I want the whole, and," cried Busham, in a threatening tone, "I mean to have it!"

"What a modest demand!" jeered Cass. "And if Mrs Moxton surrenders her property as you wish, what then?"

"I shall tell you who killed Moxton. Oh, you need not look at me as though I was an accessory before the fact. I did not see the deed done. I knew nothing about it at the time, but by putting this and that together in a way," sneered Busham, "which you are all too ignorant to understand, I have a knowledge of who killed Edgar, and why he was

killed. Don't mistake me. I hold all the threads of this case. If I get my price I shall save Mrs Moxton by revealing the name of the murderer. Should she refuse my just demand, I shall denounce her to the police and let justice take its course."

"Justice!" echoed Janet, with scorn. "And by your own showing my unhappy sister is innocent."

"I know that," retorted Busham, with an ugly look, "and I can prove her innocence. No one else can."

There was a silence for a few minutes, and then Ellis spoke quietly and to the point. "Do you know, Busham, that I feel very much inclined to kick you," said he. "You are proposing blackmail."

"Call it what you like, but give me my price."

"For what? For information which we know already?"

Busham started from his seat in nervous haste. "You know already!"

"Yes. Do you think Mr Cass and I have been idle all this time—that we have not strained every nerve to baffle a scoundrel like you, and protect two innocent women from your blackmail? You are a little late, Mr Busham. We know who killed Moxton."

"You—you—you know!" stammered the scoundrel, white to the lips.

"Yes, we know; and we have discoverd the reason why Moxton was killed. Surely you have forgotten our talk about the forged bill. Before the end of the present

week the murderer will have confessed, Mrs Moxton will be exonerated from all complicity in her husband's death, and you, Mr Busham—well, I don't know about you. But from what I guess of your share in this tragedy, you will be in gaol."

"I had nothing to do with it. Who killed Moxton?"

"Oh," laughed Cass, delighted at the confusion of Busham, "as you know there is no need to tell you the name."

The baffled lawyer looked in turn at each of the scornful faces. Then he rose in a hurry. "This is a game of bluff," he cried savagely. "You do not know who murdered Edgar, and you are trying to get my secret from me without paying for it. Oh, I know you all; I can see through you."

"It does you credit," said Janet, contemptuously.

"Sneer and jeer as much as you like, madam, you will not look so merry when your sister is in prison on a charge of murder."

"Which she never will be," put in Ellis.

"We shall see, we shall see. You think yourself a clever man, doctor, do you not? But I am cleverer. Oh, you don't know what I am. You gave me five days to confess, as you call it, or else threatened to put the matter into the hands of the police. The five days are up."

"Quite so," said Ellis, smoothly, "and as you won't hear reason I shall see the police to-morrow."

"I dare you to! I dare you to!" foamed Busham, who had

completely lost his temper. "I get my price, or Mrs Moxton goes to gaol."

"You shall not get your price," broke out Cass, as furious as Busham. "You will not get one penny of the property."

"Shall I not? Aha, you don't know that Edgar's will is burnt."

"That is where you are wrong, my friend," said Ellis, calmly. "You burnt a copy. The original will given to me by Miss Gordon is in my possession."

Busham stared so wildly that for a moment or so the others thought he was about to have a fit like Schwartz. Ellis snatched up a glass of water from the table and dashed it in the man's face. The shock brought him round a trifle, but he seemed indisposed to speak further. With the knowledge that his intrigues had proved useless came a collapse of his courage and insolence. With a kind of sob he staggered blindly towards the door and out of the room. Ellis at the window saw him running down the road reeling from side to side like a drunken man. Busham's nerve was broken. He did not even attempt to question Ellis as to the truth of his statement about the will. Instinctively he knew that the game was up, and that all his schemes had recoiled on himself. Never was there so complete a fall, so deserved a punishment.

"He will tell the police about Laura," cried Miss Gordon, nervously.

"Let him," said Cass. "We will have that confession out of

Schwartz to-morrow, and your sister will be proved innocent ; and when that confession is read, Miss Gordon, I should not wonder if there was sufficient in it to warrant Busham's arrest. There," added Cass, pointing to Busham's disappearing form, "that is the last we shall see of him." And, as subsequent events proved, he was a true prophet.

But the danger was not yet over. It was just possible that out of revenge at the failure of his plans, Busham might denounce Laura to the police. The only way to prove her innocence would be to get a confession from Schwartz. Ellis took the night to consider this question, and next day called at Goethe Cottage between eleven and twelve o'clock. He sent in his name, but quite expected that Schwartz would refuse to see him. To his secret surprise he was admitted at once and conducted into the study. Here he found the German clothed in a loose dressing-gown and seated at the desk.

Schwartz looked terribly ill. He had aged considerably since Ellis had seen him. His cheeks had fallen in, his forehead was wrinkled, and his eyes had lost their usual genial twinkle. With bowed shoulders he sat huddled up in his chair, and without offering his hand to the doctor, nodded to a seat.

"I am sorry I could not see you yesterday, doctor," said Schwartz, in a faint voice ; "I was very ill, and I had much to do. But I wished to have some conversation with you to-day. If

you had not come I should have sent for you."

Ellis replied in the German tongue which Schwartz, evidently for the sake of secrecy, was using. "You intend to confess, then?"

"Ah, then you are certain that I am guilty?"

"You must be. The pocket-book of the murdered man was found in that desk, and we know it was taken from the dead body. The other night when I accused you, you did not deny the charge."

"I had no time, doctor ; but I deny it now."

"You say that you are innocent?" said Ellis, scarcely believing his ears.

"Perfectly innocent. Here is the confession of the guilty person ;" and Schwartz, unlocking a drawer, took out two or three sheets of foolscap pinned together and covered with writing. "This is the confession," he said, "signed and witnessed."

"The confession of Busham?"

"Ach, no ; the confession of the man who murdered Moxton —my friend, Hilda's father, Captain Garret."

CHAPTER XXV

A CONFESSION

"Do you mean to say that Captain Garret murdered Moxton?" asked Ellis, in amazement, looking from the confession to Schwartz. In his excitement he had reverted to English.

"Hush! hush!" replied Schwartz, with an apprehensive

look round. "Speak in my language, doctor. Yes, Garret is the criminal. I have known it for some time, ever since I found the pocket-book, and yesterday, on seeing in what a very dangerous position I was placed, I insisted that he should write out a confession of the truth. There it is, doctor; and a great deal of money it has cost me."

"And Garret. Where is Garret?"

"On the Continent by this time. He left Victoria by the club train last night. I have seen the last of him," said Schwartz, with a sigh, "and I am glad of it."

"But Hilda?"

"Ach, poor girl! She thinks that her father has gone away for pleasure. I dare not tell her the truth; but in time I may do so, and then she will be content to stay with old Papa Schwartz who loves her."

"It is most extraordinary," murmured Ellis, turning over the leaves of foolscap. "I suspected many people, yourself included, but I never thought for a moment that Garret was guilty. How did it come about?"

"To tell you that, doctor, I must relate a little of my own history," said Schwartz, reaching for the cigar-box. "First I will tell you about myself and Garret, and then you can read what he says of the crime in that paper. Will you not take a cigar?"

"Thank you," said Ellis, and accepted this attention.

Now that he knew Schwartz was innocent he had no objection to being friendly with him; indeed,

he was pleased to think that the German was guiltless, as he ever thought the man a decent fellow in many ways. They began to smoke, and Schwartz, still speaking in German in case of eavesdropping, related such portions of his early history as dealt with Captain Garret and his daughter.

"Ten years ago I met with Garret near Monte Carlo," said Schwartz. "His wife had died, and he wandered about with little Hilda, then only six years old. Garret had started life as an officer in your army with money and a well-known name, for that which he bears now is not his true name. He married an heiress and for years was comfortably settled. Unfortunately, he took to gambling and lost everything. Having been discovered cheating at cards he was dismissed from your army. Then his wife died, and his house was sold up to pay his debts. He took the child and escaped to the Continent. But his love of gambling still clung to him. He took up his quarters in a cheap boarding-house in Monaco, and haunted the tables. The child Hilda, blind and helpless, was left to a careless nurse. I was hard up myself then, doctor, and also lived in that boarding-house. I saw Hilda, and my heart melted. She was a dear little child, and became fond of me, so that, in time, I came to look upon her as my own daughter."

"You are a good fellow, Schwartz."

"Ach, no, my friend, I am as bad as most people. But I never

married, I was a lonely man with much sentiment and emotion. Hilda loved me, she warmed my heart. I saw that she was neglected by her father, and I determined to look after her, poor dear, to make her happy."

"I think you have succeeded."

"I think so too. Yet she loves her father better than me. He was never kind to her, save in a careless way. It is always so. Hilda thinks Garret the best of men, and I have not the heart to tell her how worthless he is. Believe me, my friend, I was never blind to Garret's badness. What I did for him, I did for the little Hilda's sake. Garret met me at the boarding-house and told me his history. I offered to give him money if he would let me adopt Hilda, but seeing that my heart was touched he cunningly refused. I could not part with the child, so I had to take the burden of Garret's life on my shoulders. I said that I would help him and look after him if he was kind to little Hilda. He consented, and we have been together ever since."

"Did Garret ever make any money?"

"No, he was always idle and wasted everything. Sometimes he won money and spent it on himself; but I had to keep both him and Hilda. It was for her sake that I did so, for otherwise Garret would have taken her away from me; and that," added Schwartz, with emotion, "would have broken my heart."

"Why did you not tell Hilda all this?"

"Why should I have done so?" replied the good German, with great simplicity. "It would have broken the child's heart. It would spoil her life did I tell her now. Poor Hilda! She has enough to bear without my making her wretched. It is my wish that she should be happy. She is the dearest thing on earth to me. Without that lovely child I should die."

"I am glad you have some comfort and reward," said Ellis, touched by this speech. "So Garret, through Hilda, has lived on your money all these years?"

"Yes. Oh, I was quite willing so long as he left me the child. I need not tell you all the troubles I have had these many years, doctor. I made money, I lost money. I was poor one year, rich another; but all through my fortunes Hilda has been with me—Garret also. Three years ago I came to London, and after several failures I started the Merryman Music-Hall. It has been a success, and now I am rich. I have settled much money on Hilda, also this cottage. Even if I die she will be well off."

"If you died, her father would return and rob her."

"I often dreaded that, but now my fears are at rest. While this confession remains with you, doctor, I am not afraid. Garret admits that he is a murderer, so for his own sake he will never return to England. Now I have told you all I know about Garret, which brings us up to the time of the murder. The rest you can read in those papers."

"I shall do so later," replied Ellis, glancing at the confession, and putting it into his pocket.

"But you might tell me the story in your own way. What was the reason of the tragedy?"

"The forged bill you spoke of the other night."

"Who forged the bill?"

"Garret. I refused to give him any more money as he was squandering all I had. He was acquainted with young Moxton, and knew how rich the elder Moxton was. Edgar showed Garret a letter from his father, so Garret forged the old man's signature on a bill. He accepted it himself, and managed to get money on it. Of course, he thought that if he were discovered I would buy back the bill at any price, so that he would not be disgraced. He counted on my love for Hilda, you see."

"And how was the forgery discovered?"

"Old Moxton found it out just before he died. He passed the bill on to Busham, as his lawyer, to take steps to arrest Garret. Busham did not do anything at the moment. Then old Moxton died, and that same night Busham brought the bill to Edgar at my music-hall."

"Ah! then in spite of his denial he met Edgar on that night?"

"Garret told me so," replied Schwartz. "I knew very little of Edgar Moxton save that he was a bad man. Busham gave him the bill, for Edgar, on hearing of his father's death, insisted upon having it."

"How did he know that the bill was in existence?"

"Busham told him about it, when Edgar inquired after the estates. He did not care at all about his father's death. He wanted the money; and although he was now rich he still wished for more. Janet Gordon had told him how I looked after Garret on Hilda's account, and he knew, of course, that the music-hall was my property. He then followed Garret into my room where I was, and, showing him the bill, accused him of the forgery. I saw him replace the bill in the red pocket-book and put that in his pocket. Garret also saw in which pocket he placed it."

"What did Moxton want?"

"The music-hall. He had been drinking, and was also intoxicated by the money that had come to him. He said that if I did not give him the music-hall and make it over legally to him, he would have Garret arrested."

"What did you do? How did you answer the scoundrel?" asked Ellis.

"I refused," replied Schwartz, with energy. "I had done much for Garret, but even for Hilda's sake I could not beggar her and myself by giving up my property. Garret insisted that I should save him at any cost, but I said I could do nothing; and Moxton went away swearing that he would have Garret arrested on the morrow."

"And Garret?"

"Finding that I would do nothing he rushed away distracted. What I now tell you he told me afterwards. By accident he took

my fur-lined coat and put it on, leaving his own behind. Then he followed Edgar home in the hope of robbing him of the bill while he was drunk. He saw Zirknitz quarrel with Edgar on the Dukesfield platform and kept out of the way. Then he followed Moxton when he left the station."

"Busham followed also?"

"Yes, but he did not let Garret see him. Busham wished to get back the bill himself, as he wanted to keep all power in his own hands. That was why he followed Edgar from the music-hall. On seeing Garret, he wondered what he was after, and watched."

"Oh," said Ellis, "so this was what Busham did? His talk with the policeman and pursuit of Mrs Moxton to Pimlico was all lies."

"I don't know about those things, doctor. Garret followed Edgar to the gate of Myrtle Villa, when he saw the door open, and Mrs Moxton rush out with a carving-knife. Moxton began to struggle with her at the gate. She held the knife over him—I don't know why."

"She did not wish to hurt him. Go on."

"Garret saw the knife flash in the moonlight, so he ran along, and seizing it, stabbed Moxton in the back. He fell with a cry and Mrs Moxton under him. Garret ran away, but returned to find Edgar dead, and Mrs Moxton in a faint."

"That must have been the time when Edgar wrote the blood signs."

"Yes, no doubt. Well, Garret

searched for the pocket-book and found it. He threw the knife beside the corpse, thinking it would be said that Mrs Moxton had killed her husband. Then, hearing footsteps approaching, he went away quickly."

"That must have been Miss Gordon. She returned for her purse, and on finding what had happened, remained to shield her sister. Brave woman!"

"Ach! my friend, that is so. Janet is both brave and good. But to continue, Garret went into a quiet part of Dukesfield and took the bill out of the pocket-book. As he was burning it—for he destroyed it at once by setting light to it with a match—Busham came up and accused him of the murder."

"Did Busham see it committed?"

"He did. He followed Garret, and, hidden in the shade, saw him stab Moxton. But he promised to hold his tongue about it, provided he got Moxton's money. Garret was relieved by this promise, and putting the pocket-book into the pocket of my coat, which he wore, he returned to Goethe Cottage."

"To confess his crime?"

"No, he said nothing; and even though I heard of Edgar's death, I did not think that Garret had killed him. But when I put on my coat one evening I found the pocket-book, and recognised it as Edgar's. I then accused Garret of the murder, and he told me all I have told you. I held my tongue, for Hilda's sake, and as Busham was hoping to get the

money by accusing Mrs Moxton of the crime, he was silent too. I placed the pocket-book in my desk, where Janet found it. I should have destroyed it, but I thought no one would open my desk. Hilda, by her folly, has ruined her father, but I shall not make her heart ache by telling her so."

"What did you say to Garret?"

"I told him that you had the pocket-book, and accused me of the crime. I refused to suffer for his sake, and made him write out the confession, which is witnessed by myself and two servants. But they do not know the contents. I threatened to hand Garret over to the police if he did not tell the truth, as I wished to save myself and Hilda. Then I gave him some money, and told him to go away and never let me see him again. He wanted to take Hilda, but I gave him the choice of leaving her with me, or suffering for his crime. In the end, he went away last night, and so that is all I can tell you."

"I think you are well rid of a bad lot, Herr Schwartz."

"I think so too," replied the German. "I never liked him; but for the sake of Hilda I tolerated him. I will not tell her the truth; but as Garret is away, and will remain away, I have no doubt I can explain sufficient to reconcile her to his absence. So I have my Hilda to myself at last, doctor, and thank God for that."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE END OF THE STORY

So in this way the truth was discovered, and Ellis returned to show the confession of Captain Garret to Mrs Moxton. Laura was so overcome that her innocence was proved, her dread was removed, that she fainted during the recital. While Ellis and Janet were looking after her, Cass arrived. Mrs Moxton recovered her senses, and retired to lie down; while Harry, having read the confession, discussed what was to be done with it.

"If you show it to the police, I am afraid Schwartz will get into trouble, as he has permitted a criminal to escape."

"That is true enough," replied Ellis. "For my part, now that we have absolute proof of Mrs Moxton's innocence, I don't think it is necessary to make the matter public."

"Mr Busham may do so, out of revenge," said Janet.

"Don't you believe it, Miss Gordon. Busham, by the showing of this confession, knew all about the crime. He saw it committed, he tampered with Garret, and held his tongue in order to secure Moxton's money. On the face of it, he is an accessory after the fact, and, terrified by the fear of punishment, will keep silence. Besides, even if he does speak, we can first warn Schwartz to leave England, and then inform the police. Busham does not know, and never will know, that Schwartz

has been implicated in Garret's escape."

"What Harry says is very true," chimed in Ellis. "I think all danger is over."

"Thank God for that!" cried Janet, clasping her hands. "Oh, how terrible these past months have been!"

"You will have no more trouble if I can help it," said the doctor, taking her hand. "What I said when I believed you to be Mrs Moxton, I say now; and I ask you to be my honoured wife."

Janet sobbed. "You forget! I have a shady past!"

"A noble past. You have been tested in the furnace of affliction, and have come out pure gold."

"I sold programmes at a low music-hall."

"My dearest, I know all you have done, and how good you have been. As my wife, I hope you will find that happiness which has been denied to you for so long. You love me, Janet, do you not?"

"Yes, I love you, because you believed in me when no one else did."

Harry laughed in a somewhat shamefaced manner. "Is that meant for me, Miss Gordon? If so, I recant my former errors. I think you are the noblest of women, and I congratulate Bob on getting such a wife."

"Hullo! Harry. I thought you did not want me to marry Janet."

"Now I do, because I know the truth. Bless you, my children, and let me be your best man."

"There is one thing to be said,"

observed Ellis, uneasily. "Janet cannot marry me here, where she is known as Mrs Moxton. Mrs Basket may make trouble, and I cannot afford to give up my practice—such as it is."

"Leave that to me," said Janet, nodding. "My sister Laura owes you everything, and when she gets her fortune she will give you enough money to buy a practice far away from Mrs Basket and this horrid little place. I am sure I do not wish to live in this district after what I have undergone. When I leave Myrtle Villa, I leave Dukesfield for ever."

"But, Janet, I don't like taking money from Mrs Moxton."

"Why not? Because it is red money?"

"Red money!" repeated Cass, struck by the phrase, "and what is red money?"

"Ah!" said Janet, smiling "then there is something you don't know of which I am aware. Red money is a term given by gipsies to that which comes by a violent death. My sister inherits her fortune through the murder of her husband; therefore, according to Romany lore, it is red money. But if Robert will not take the money from Laura, she shall give it to me. She owes me something, I think."

"She owes you everything, my dearest," said Ellis, kissing her "and you will do what you please."

"Oh, by the way," cried Cass, suddenly, "I thought I had something to tell you. Schwartz has given up his secret gambling *salon*."

"Did it ever exist?" said Ellis, sceptically.

"Yes," replied Janet, blushing. "I never saw it, but in one way and another I heard of it. Often and often I implored Papa Schwartz to give it up, telling him he would get into trouble."

"Well, he has given it up at last. It appears that the police got to know of it, and contemplated a raid, so Schwartz shut it up a few nights ago; and I rather think he is going to give up the hall itself."

"A very wise thing for him to do," said Ellis, approvingly. "He has made a sufficient fortune—he told me so; therefore he can retire and live happily with his beloved Hilda."

"And what about Hilda's eyes, Robert?"

"I think I can cure them by an operation."

"Oh, I am sure you can do anything," said Janet, fervently.

But in this Janet was wrong. Ellis did perform an operation, but it failed principally because Hilda, fretting after her father, could not be kept in a serene frame of mind during the recovery. But the cure mattered little, for shortly there came news from Madrid that Garret had been stabbed in a gambling-house row. By the irony of fate he met with the same death as he had meted out to Moxton, and Hilda wept so much that her chance of recovering sight was irrevocably gone. On hearing of Garret's death, and being set free from a dread that Hilda would be taken from him, Schwartz went to reside

in Munich. He sold the music-hall and the cottage, invested his money well, and with Hilda he now lives a calm and happy life in the German Athens; and in spite of his late business of a gambling-house keeper and the many flaws in his character, Schwartz deserved to be happy. He rescued the blind girl from a life of misery; he bore the burdens of her rascally father, and he made her happy. Under the tender care of Schwartz, Hilda forgot her sorrow. She never knew that her father was a murderer, and always thought of him with tender affection as the best and most unfortunate of men. Schwartz did not disturb this impression, knowing that Garret was not the first sinner who had been wrongly canonised as a saint. All the good German desired was the happiness of his beloved Hilda, and in securing it he thoroughly succeeded. That was his reward, and so he passes out of the story.

Janet never did have much belief in Laura's gratitude, and said as much to Ellis. Her belief came true, for when Laura, relieved from her terrors, blossomed into a wealthy young widow on her father-in-law's money, she forgot all that her sister had done and sacrificed for her. It was no easy task to settle the estate, for, when Busham was informed by letter that Garret had confessed, he was seized with panic and went to the States.

But he did not go away empty-handed; that was not Mr Busham's way of doing things. Al-

ready he had ample money, but he managed also to secure a good deal of loose cash which belonged to the Moxton estate, and left behind him an insulting letter to Ellis. In America, Busham changed his name, but as wickedness was born in him he could not change his nature. What became of him Ellis never heard. He vanished into the vast unknown of the States; but, having regard to the money he took with him and his known capabilities of screwing it out of others, it is quite possible that he is flourishing at present like a green bay tree. The wicked are not always punished in this world, and Busham's escape is an illustration of this fact. Still, his inherent rascality may some day bring him before Mr Justice Lynch, and he may end as he deserves.

Dr Ellis worked loyally to put Mrs Moxton's affairs in order, and received from her the same gratitude as she gave to Janet. For very shame's sake she was obliged to give her sister a sum of money in compensation for all she had done. Ellis did not wish to take a sum so grudgingly given, but Janet looked upon it as her right, and took it without false shame. She was as disgusted with Laura as with Rudolph, and was glad to see the last of them. All her years of self-sacrifice and work were as nothing in their eyes, and now that Janet had found a good husband she thought it was only right to look after her own happiness. A few months after the discovery of Garret's guilt she was married quietly to Ellis in a

Hampstead church, and afterwards departed with him to a country town, where Ellis, with Mrs Moxton's money, bought a practice. Neither Laura nor Rudolph came to the wedding, as they had already gone to the Continent. After he had confessed his traitorous behaviour, Rudolph called on Janet and tried to cajole her into forgiving him. But she was so disgusted with him that she refused to have anything more to do with the rascal. He was more successful with Laura, and as she was now rich, he paid great attention to her. Notwithstanding her knowledge of his contemptible character, Laura went abroad with him and kept him in idleness with her wealth. The pair travelled to Vienna and there lived as happily as a memory of the terrible past would let them. This means that they had not a care in the world, for both their natures were too frivolous to be impressed by the perils they had escaped. So, like Busham, they flourished also, and deserved their immunity from punishment as little.

Mrs Basket lamented bitterly when she lost her lodger, and tried to find out why and where he was going. But Ellis, having had experience of his fat landlady's malignity, refused to gratify her curiosity. Also he wished to cut himself and Janet off from the old life of trouble at Dukesfield, and so vanished from Mrs Basket's gaze. Cass remained with her for a time, but as his circumstances improved, he decided to move into town, and took

chambers in St Clement's Inn. In this way and in a few years all the actors in the Moxton tragedy disappeared from Dukesfield, and no reminder was left of it but the tombstone erected over the wretched man's grave by Laura. The inscription, "Erected by his sorrowful wife," was rather ironical, when it was considered how Laura hated the man she thus honoured. But Laura was fond of posing as a disconsolate widow. She thought it attracted the men.

A year after the tragedy Harry Cass paid a visit to the country town where Ellis lived, and in which his practice was rapidly increasing. He possessed a charming house on the outskirts of the old town; he had set up a carriage, and possessed a good hack. Aided by Janet's good sense and strict notions of an economy instilled by poverty, the sum of money grudgingly given by Laura had done wonders, and Dr Ellis started his new life on an excellent basis. He was not a great physician, but he was clever and also popular. The ladies in the neighbourhood called on Mrs Ellis and found her charming, for Janet's life, and travels, and experience led her to adapt herself skilfully to the provincial narrowness of these good people. She was quite as popular as her husband, and in time there is no doubt that Ellis will become the most sought-after physician in the county.

"But Harley Street, Bob," urged Harry, as he sat with husband and wife in the garden after

dinner. "What about Harley Street?"

"That must wait," laughed Ellis; "and if it does not come I really don't care. Do you remember my expressed wishes, Harry, on the night Moxton was killed? 'A good practice, a moderate income, a home, and a wife to love me.' Well, I have got the whole four, and that is better luck than falls to the lot of most men. I am quite content to stay here and be happy."

"And you, Mrs Ellis, after your stormy, early life?"

"I am content to remain in this haven," smiled Janet. "I have a good home and a loving husband. What more can a woman want?"

"Egad! some women want a sight more. Your story is not known here?"

"No," replied Ellis, promptly. "Janet and I have cut ourselves off completely from the past. We never think of it."

"Except when we are obliged," said Mrs Ellis. "I received a letter from Laura the other day. She is going to be married to an Austrian officer, a young Count who is deeply in love with her."

"H'm! or with her money?" said Cass. "However, if she buys a title in that way I suppose she will be satisfied. And her husband has only been dead a year! She is soon consoled. I hope she will have better luck with her second husband than she had with her first. And Zirknitz?"

"He is in Italy, in attendance on an American heiress."

"Oh, poor heiress! He will marry her and spend her money,"

"Laura says nothing about marriage."

"But it will take place all the same," said Cass, promptly. "Zirknitz is the most fascinating scoundrel I ever met. Even though a woman knew he was a scamp she would love him. Oh, he'll marry money and be rich, and, having no heart, be as happy as the day is long."

"Well, Edgar never liked him."

"I know that, else he would not have accused him of being his murderer."

"As to that," said Ellis musingly, "I can never quite understand Moxton's reason. If he did not wish to harm Zirknitz, why did he write the initials of his name at all? If he did, why put them in a secret writing known only to his wife and Janet?"

Janet shook her head. "I think

at the last he had some compunction for the way in which he had treated Laura. He believed that Zirknitz had killed him, and wished to give Laura power over him lest he should take her money."

"That is not a very satisfactory explanation," said Cass, with a shrug. "But I suppose no other can be given. At all events, Zirknitz did get some of Laura's money."

"Red money," said Mrs Ellis, with a shudder; "the money of violence!"

"Well, red money has done a lot for me," said the doctor, putting his arm round his wife's waist; "it has given me this ease and you."

"Not me, Robert. I came to you of my own accord."

"Dearest and best of women," said Ellis, and kissed her fondly.

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THE SILENT HOUSE IN PIMLICO

CHAPTER I

THE TENANT OF THE SILENT HOUSE

LUCIAN DENZIL was a briefless barrister, who so far departed from the traditions of his brethren of the long robe as not to dwell within the purlieus of the Temple. For certain private reasons, not unconnected with economy, he occupied rooms in Geneva Square, Pimlico; and, for the purposes of his profession, repaired daily from ten to four to Serjeant's Inn, where he shared an office with a friend equally briefless and poor.

This state of things sounds hardly enviable, but Lucian, being young and independent to the extent of £300 a year, was not dissatisfied with his position. As his age was only twenty-five, there was ample time, he thought, to succeed in his profession; and, pending that desirable consummation, he cultivated the muses on a little oatmeal, after the fashion of his kind. There have been lives less happily circumstanced.

Geneva Square was a kind of backwater of the great river of town life which swept past its entrance with speed and clamour without disturbing the peace within. One long, narrow street led from a roaring thoroughfare into a silent quadrangle of tall grey houses, occupied by lodging-house keepers, city clerks and two or three artists, who represented the Bohemian element of the place. In

the centre there was an oasis of green lawn, surrounded by rusty iron railings the height of a man, dotted with elms of considerable age and streaked with narrow paths of yellow gravel.

The surrounding houses represented an eminently respectable appearance, with their immaculately clean steps, white curtained windows and neat boxes of flowers. The windows glittered like diamonds, the door-knobs and plates shone with a yellow lustre, and there were no sticks, or straws, or waste paper lying about to mar the tidy look of the square.

With one exception, Geneva Square was a pattern of all that was desirable in the way of cleanliness and order. One might hope to find such a haven in some somnolent cathedral town, but scarcely in the grimy, smoky, restless metropolis of London.

The exception to the notable spotlessness of the neighbourhood was No. 13, a house in the centre of the side opposite to the entrance. Its windows were dusty and without blinds or curtains, there were no flower-boxes on the ledges, the steps lacked whitewash and the iron railings looked rusty for want of paint. Stray straws and scraps of paper found their way down the area, where the cracked pavement was damp with green slime. Such beggars as occasionally wandered into the square, to the scandal of its inhabitants, camped on the doorstep; and the very door itself presented a battered, dissolute appearance.

Yet, for all its ill looks and disreputable suggestions, those who dwelt in Geneva Square would not have seen it furbished up and occupied for any money. They spoke about it in whispers, with ostentatious tremblings and daunted looks, for No. 13 was supposed to be haunted, and had been empty for over twenty years. By reason of its legend, its loneliness and grim appearance, it was known as the Silent House, and formed quite a feature of the place. Murder had been done long ago in one of its empty, dusty rooms, and it was since then that the victim walked. Lights, said the ghost-seers, had been seen flitting from window to window, groans were sometimes heard, and the apparition of a little old woman in brocaded silk and high-heeled shoes appeared on occasions. Hence the Silent House bore an uncanny reputation.

How much truth there was in these stories it is impossible to say; but sure enough, in spite of a low rental, no tenant would take No. 13 and face its ghostly terrors. House and apparition and legend had become quite a tradition, when the whole fantasy was ended in the summer of '95 by the unexpected occupation of the mansion. Mr. Mark Berwin, a gentleman of mature age, who came from nobody knew where, rented No. 13, and established himself therein to lead a strange and lonely life.

At first the gossips, strong in ghostly tradition, declared that the new tenant would not remain a week in the house; but as the week extended into six months, and Mr. Berwin showed no signs of leaving, they left off speaking of the ghost and took to discussing the man himself. In a short space of time quite a collection of stories were told about the new-comer and his strange ways.

Lucian heard many of these tales from his landlady. How Mr. Berwin lived all alone in the Silent House without servant or companion; how

he spoke to none, and admitted no one into the mansion; how he appeared to have plenty of money, and was frequently seen coming home more or less intoxicated; and how Mrs. Kebby, the deaf charwoman who cleaned out Mr. Berwin's rooms, declined to sleep in the house because she considered that there was something wrong about her employer.

To such gossip Denzil paid little attention, until his skein of life became unexpectedly entangled with that of the strange gentleman. The manner of their meeting was unforeseen and peculiar.

One foggy November night, Lucian, returning from the theatre shortly after eleven o'clock, dismissed his hansom at the entrance to the square, and walked thereinto through the thick mist, trusting to find his way home by reason of two years' familiarity with the precincts. As it was impossible to see even the glare of the near gas-lamp in the murky air, Lucian felt his way cautiously along the railings. The square was filled with fog, dense to the eye and cold to the feel, so that Lucian shivered with the chill, in spite of the fur coat over his evening clothes.

As he edged gingerly along, and thought longingly of the fire and supper awaiting him in his comfortable rooms, he was startled by hearing a deep rich voice boom out almost at his feet. To make the phenomenon still more remarkable, the voice shaped itself into certain well-known words of Shakespeare:—

“Oh!” boomed this *vox et præterea nihil* in rather husky tones, “Oh! that a man should put an enemy in his mouth to steal away his brains.” And then through the mist and darkness came the unmistakable sound of sobs.

“God bless me!” cried Lucian, leaping back with shaken nerves. “What is this? Who are you?”

“A lost soul!” wailed the deep voice, “which God will not bless!” and then came the sobbing again.

It made Denzil's blood run cold to hear this unseen creature weeping in the gloom. Moving cautiously in the direction of the sound, he stumbled against a man with his folded arms resting on the railings, and his face bent down on his arms. He made no attempt to turn when Lucian touched him, but, with downcast head, continued to weep and moan in a very frenzy of self-pity.

"Here!" said the young barrister, shaking the stranger by the shoulder, "what is the matter with you?"

"Drink," stuttered the man, suddenly turning with a dramatic gesture. "I am an object-lesson to teetotalers; a warning to topers; a modern helot made shameful to disgust youth with vice."

"You had better go home, sir," said Lucian sharply.

"I can't find home. It is somewhere hereabout, but where I don't know."

"You are in Geneva Square," said Denzil, trying to sharpen the dulled wits of the man.

"I wish I was in No. 13 of it," sighed the stranger. "Where the deuce is No. 13? Not in this Clondcuckooland anyhow."

"Oh!" cried Lucian, taking the man's arm. "Come with me. I'll lead you home, Mr. Berwin."

Scarcely had the name passed his lips than the stranger drew back suddenly, with a hasty exclamation. Some suspicion seemed to engender a mixture of terror and defiance which placed him on his guard against undue intimacy, even when some undefined fear was knocking at his heart. "Who are you?" he demanded in a steadier tone. "How do you know my name?"

"My name is Denzil, Mr. Berwin, and I live in one of the houses of this square. As you mention No. 13 I know you can be none other than Mr. Mark Berwin, the tenant of the Silent House."

"The dweller in the haunted house," sneered Berwin, evidently

relieved, "who stays there with ghosts and worse than ghosts."

"Worse than ghosts?"

"The phantoms of my own sins, young man. I have sowed folly, and now I am reaping the crop. I am—" here his further speech was interrupted by a fit of coughing, which shook his lean figure severely. At its conclusion he was so exhausted that he was forced to support himself against the railings—"A portion of the crop," he murmured.

Lucian was sorry for the man, who seemed scarcely capable of looking after himself; and he thought it unwise to leave him in such a plight. At the same time he was impatient of lingering in the heart of the clammy fog at such a late hour; so, as his companion seemed indisposed to move, he caught him again by the arm without ceremony. The abrupt action seemed to waken again the fears of Berwin.

"Where would you take me?" he asked, resisting the gentle force used by Lucian.

"To your own house; you will be ill if you stay here."

"You are not one of them?" asked the man suddenly.

"One of whom?"

"One of those who wish to harm me?"

Denzil began to think he had to do with a madman, and to gain his ends he spoke to him in a soothing manner, as he would to a child. "I wish to do you good, Mr. Berwin," said he gently. "Come to your home."

"Home! home! Ah, God, I have no home."

Nevertheless he gathered himself together, and with his arm in that of his guide, stumbled along in the thick chill mist. Lucian knew the position of No. 13 well, as it almost faced the lodgings occupied by himself, and by skirting the railings with due caution, he managed to half lead half drag his companion to the house. When they stood before the door, and

Berwin had assured himself that he was actually home by use of his latch-key, Denzil wished him a curt good-night. "And I should advise you to go to bed at once," he concluded, turning to descend the steps.

"Don't go! don't go!" cried Berwin seizing the young man by the arm. "I am afraid to go in by myself; all is so dark and cold. Wait until I get a light."

As the creature's nerves seemed to be unhinged by over-indulgence in alcohol, and he stood gasping and shivering on the threshold like some beaten animal, Lucian took compassion on his wretchedness.

"I'll see you indoors," said he, and striking a match, stepped into the darkness after the man. The hall of No. 13 seemed to be almost as cold as the world without, and the trifling glimmer of the lucifer served rather to reveal than dispel the surrounding darkness. The light, as it were, hollowed a gulf out of the tremendous gloom, and made the house tenfold more ghostly than before. The footsteps of Denzil and Berwin sounding on the bare boards—for the hall was uncarpeted—waked hollow echoes, and when they paused, the silence which ensued seemed almost menacing. The grim reputation of the mansion, its gloom and silence, appealed powerfully to the latent superstition of Lucian. How much more nearly, then, would it touch the shaken and excited nerves of the tragic drunkard who dwelt continually amid its terrors.

Berwin opened a door on the right-hand side of the hall, and turned up the light of a handsome oil lamp which had been screwed down pending his arrival. This lamp was placed on a small square table covered with a white cloth and a dainty cold supper. The young barrister noted that the napery, cutlery, and crystal were all of the finest; that the viands were choice; that champagne and claret were the beverages. Evidently Ber-

win was a luxurious gentleman and indulgent to his appetites.

Lucian tried to gain a long look at him in the mellow light, but Berwin kept his face turned away, and seemed as anxious now for his visitor to go as he had been for him to enter. Denzil, quick in comprehension, took the hint at once.

"I'll go now, as you have the light burning," said he. "Good night."

"Good-night," replied Berwin shortly, and added to his courtesy by letting Lucian find his way out alone.

And so ended the barrister's first meeting with the strange tenant of the Silent House.

CHAPTER II

SHADOWS ON THE BLIND

THE landlady of Denzil was a rather uncommon specimen of the class. She inclined to plumpness, was lively in the extreme, wore very fashionable garments of the brightest colours, and—although somewhat elderly—still cherished a hope that some young man would elevate her to the rank of a matron.

At present Miss Julia Greeb was an unwedded damsel of forty summers who, with the aid of art, was making desperate but ineffectual efforts to detain the youth which was slipping from her. She pinched her waist, dyed her hair, powdered her face, and affected juvenile dress of the white frock and blue sash kind. In the distance she looked a girlish twenty; close at hand various artifices aided her to pass for thirty; and it was only in the solitude of her own room that her real age was apparent. Never

did woman wage a more resolute fight with Time than did Miss Greeb.

But this was the worst and most frivolous side of her character ; for she was really a good-hearted, cheery little woman, with a brisk manner, and a flow of talk unequalled in Geneva Square. She had been born in the house she occupied, after the death of her father, and had grown up to assist her mother in ministering to the exactions of a continuous procession of lodgers. These came and went, married and died ; but not one of the desirable young men had borne Miss Greeb to the altar, so that when her mother died, the fair Julia almost despaired of attaining to the dignity of wifehood. Nevertheless she continued to keep boarders, and to make attempts to captivate the hearts of such bachelors as she judged weak in character.

Hitherto all her efforts had been more or less of a mercantile character, with an eye to money ; but when Lucian Denzil appeared on the scene, the poor little woman really fell in love with his handsome face. But, in strange contrast to her other efforts, Miss Greeb never for a moment deemed that Lucian would marry her. He was her god, her ideal of manhood, and to him she offered worship, and burnt incense after the manner of her kind.

Denzil occupied a bedroom and sitting-room, both pleasant, airy apartments looking out on to the square. Miss Greeb attended to his needs herself, and brought up his breakfast with her own fair hands ; happy for the day if her admired lodger conversed with her for a few moments before reading the morning paper. Then Miss Greeb would retire to her own sitting-room and indulge in day dreams which she well knew would never be realised. The romances she wove herself were even more marvellous than those she read in her favourite penny novelettes ; but, unlike the printed tales, her romance never culminated in marriage. Poor

brainless, silly, pitiful Miss Greeb ; she would have made a good wife and a fond mother, but by some irony of fate she was destined to be neither ; and the comedy of her husband-hunting youth was now changing into the lonely tragedy of disappointed spinsterhood. She was one of the world's unknown martyrs, and her fate merits tears rather than laughter.

On the morning after his meeting with Berwin, the young barrister sat at breakfast, with Miss Greeb in anxious attendance. Having poured out his tea and handed him his paper, and ascertained that his breakfast was to his liking, Miss Greeb lingered about the room, putting this straight and that crooked, in the hope that Lucian would converse with her. In this she was gratified, as Denzil wished to learn details about the strange man he had assisted on the previous night ; and he knew that no one could afford him more precise information than his brisk landlady, to whom was known all the gossip of the neighbourhood. His first word made Miss Greeb flutter back to the table like a dove to its nest.

"Do you know anything about No. 13 ?" asked Lucian, stirring his tea.

"Do I know anything about No. 13 ?" repeated Miss Greeb in shrill amazement. "Of course I do, Mr. Denzil ; there ain't a thing I don't know about that house. Ghosts and vampires and crawling spectres live in it—that they do."

"Do you call Mr. Berwin a ghost ?"

"No ; nor nothing half so respectable. He is a mystery, sir, that's what Mr. Berwin is, and I don't care if he hears me commit myself so far."

"In what way is he a mystery ?" demanded Denzil, approaching the matter with more particularity.

"Why," said Miss Greeb, evidently puzzled how to answer this leading question, "no one can find out anything about him. He's full of secrets and underhand goings on. It ain't

respectable not to be fair and above board—that it ain’t.”

“I see no reason why a quiet-living old gentleman should tell his private affairs to the whole square,” remarked Lucian drily.

“Those who have nothing bad to conceal needn’t be afraid of speaking out,” retorted Miss Greeb tartly. “And the way in which Mr. Berwin lives is enough to make one think him a coiner, or a thief, or even a murderer—that it is.”

“But what grounds have you to believe him any one of the three?”

This question also puzzled the landlady, as she had no reasonable grounds for her wild statements; nevertheless she made a determined attempt to substantiate them by hearsay evidence. “Mr. Berwin,” said she in significant tones, “lives all alone in that haunted house.”

“Why not? Every man has the right to be a misanthrope if he chooses.”

“He has no right to behave so, in a respectable square,” replied Miss Greeb, shaking her head. “There’s only two rooms of that large house furnished, and all the rest is given up to dust and ghosts. Mr. Berwin won’t have a servant to live under his roof, and Mrs. Kebby, who does his charing, says he drinks awful. Then he has his meals sent in from the Nelson Hotel round the corner, and eats them all alone. He don’t receive no letters, he don’t read no newspapers, and stays in all day, only coming out at night like an owl. If he ain’t a criminal, Mr. Denzil, why does he carry on so?”

“He may dislike his fellow-men, and desire to live a secluded life.”

Miss Greeb still shook her head. “He may dislike his fellow-men,” she said with emphasis, “but that don’t keep him from seeing them—ah, that it don’t.”

“Is there anything wrong in that?” said Lucian, contemptuous of these cobweb objections.

“Perhaps not, Mr. Denzil; but

where do those he sees come from?”

“How do you mean, Miss Greeb?”

“They don’t go in by the front door that’s certain,” continued the little woman darkly. “There’s only one entrance to this square, sir, and Blinders the policeman is frequently on duty there. Two or three nights he’s met Mr. Berwin coming in after dark and exchanged friendly greetings with him, and each time Mr. Berwin has been alone.”

“Well! well! What of that?” said Denzil impatiently.

“This much, Mr. Denzil, that Blinders has gone round the square after seeing Mr. Berwin, and has seen shadows—two or three of them—on the sitting-room blind. Now, sir,” cried Miss Greeb, clinching her argument, “if Mr. Berwin came into the square alone, how did his visitors get in?”

“Perhaps by the back,” conjectured Lucian.

Again Miss Greeb shook her head. “I know the back of No. 13 as well as I know my own face,” she declared. “There’s a yard and a fence, but no entrance. To get in there you have to go in by the front door or down the airy steps; and you can’t do neither without coming past Blinders at the square’s entrance, and that,” finished Miss Greeb triumphantly, “these visitors don’t do.”

“They may have come into the square during the day, when Blinders was not on duty.”

“No, sir,” said Miss Greeb, ready for this objection. “I thought of that myself, and as my duty to the square I have inquired—that I have. On two occasions I’ve asked the day policeman, and he says no one passed.”

“Then,” said Lucian, rather puzzled, “Mr. Berwin cannot live alone in the house.”

“Begging your pardon, I’m sure,” cried the pertinacious woman, “but he does. Mrs. Kebby has been all over the house, and there isn’t another soul in it. No, Mr. Denzil, take it

what way you will, there's something that ain't right about Mr. Berwin—if that's his real name, which I don't believe it is."

"Why, Miss Greeb?"

"Just because I don't," replied the landlady with feminine logic. "And if you think of having anything to do with this mystery, Mr. Denzil, I beg of you not to, else you may come to something as is too terrible to consider—that you may."

"Such as—?"

"Oh, I don't know," cried Miss Greeb, tossing her head and gliding towards the door. "It ain't for me to say what I think. I am the last person in the world to meddle with what don't concern me—that I am;" and thus ending the conversation Miss Greeb vanished, with significant looks and pursed-up lips.

The reason of this last speech and rapid retreat lay in the fact that Miss Greeb could bring no tangible charge against her opposite neighbour; and therefore hinted at his complicity in all kinds of horrors, which she was quite unable to define save in terms more or less vague.

Lucian dismissed such hints of criminality from his mind as the outcome of Miss Greeb's very lively imagination; yet, even though he reduced her communications to bare facts, he could not but acknowledge that there was something queer about Mr. Berwin and his mode of life. The man's self-pity and self-condemnation; his hints that certain people wished to do him harm; the curious episode of the shadows on the blind—these things engaged the curiosity of Denzil in no ordinary degree; and he could not but admit to himself that it would greatly ease his mind to arrive at some reasonable explanation of Berwin's eccentricities.

Nevertheless, he held that he had no right to pry into the secrets of the stranger; and honourably strove to dismiss the tenant of No. 13 and his tantalising environments from his mind. But such dismissal of un-

worthy curiosity was more difficult to effect than he expected.

For the next week Lucian resolutely banished the subject from his thoughts, and declined to discuss the matter further with Miss Greeb. That little woman, all on fire with curiosity, made various inquiries of her gossips regarding the doings of Mr. Berwin; and in default of reporting the same to her lodger, occupied herself in discussing them with her neighbours. The consequence of this incessant gossip was that the eyes of the whole square fixed themselves on No. 13 in expectation of some catastrophe, although no one knew exactly what was going to happen.

This undefinable feeling of impending disaster communicating itself to Lucian, stimulated his curiosity to such a pitch that, with some feeling of shame for his weakness, he walked round the square on two several evenings in the hope of meeting Berwin. But on both occasions he was unsuccessful.

On the third evening he was more fortunate, for having worked at his law books until late at night, he went out for a brisk walk before retiring to rest. The night was cold, and there had been a slight fall of snow, so Lucian wrapped himself up well, lighted his pipe, and proceeded to take the air by tramping twice or thrice round the square. Overhead the sky was clear and frosty, with chill glittering stars and a wintry moon. A thin covering of snow lay on the pavement, and there was a white rime on the bare branches of the central trees.

On coming to the house of Berwin, the barrister saw that the sitting-room was lighted up and the curtains undrawn, so that the window presented a square of illuminated blind. Even as he looked, two shadows darkened the white surface—the shadows of a man and a woman. Evidently they had come between the lamp and the window, and so, quite unknowingly, revealed their

actions to the ~~so~~ ^{so} the. Curious to see the end of this shadow pantomime, Lucian stood still and looked intently at the window.

The two figures seemed to be arguing, for their heads nodded violently and their arms waved constantly. They retreated out of the sphere of light, and again came into it, still continuing their furious gestures. Unexpectedly the male shadow seized the female by the throat and swung her like a feather to and fro. The struggling figures reeled out of the radiance and Lucian heard a faint cry.

Thinking that something was wrong, he rushed up the steps and rang the bell violently. Almost before the sound died away, the light in the room was extinguished and he could see nothing more. Again and again he rang, but without attracting attention; so Lucian finally left the house and went in search of Blinders, the policeman, to narrate his experience. At the entrance to Geneva Square he ran against a man whom he recognised in the clear moonlight.

To his surprise he beheld Mark Berwin.

"Your fancy was wrong, you see. I am not indoors."

"Then who is in your house?"

Berwin shrugged his shoulders. "No one, so far as I know."

"You are mistaken, sir. There was a light in your room, and I saw the shadows of a man and a woman struggling together thrown on the blind."

"People in my house!" said Berwin, laying a shaking hand on the arm of Lucian. "Impossible."

"I tell you it is so."

"Come, then, and we will look for them," said Berwin in a tremulous voice.

"But they have gone by this time."

"Gone!"

"Yes," said Denzil rapidly. "I rang the bell, as I fancied there was some fatal quarrel going on within. At once the light was put out, and, as I could attract no one to the door, I suppose the man and woman must have fled."

For a moment or so Berwin said nothing, but his grip on Lucian's arm relaxed, and he moved forward a few steps. "You must be mistaken, Mr. Denzil," said he in altered tones, "there can be no person in my house. I locked the door before I went out, and I have been absent at least two hours."

"Then I must be mad or dreaming!" retorted Lucian with heat.

"We can soon prove if you are either of the two, sir. Come with me and examine the house for yourself."

"Pardon me," said Denzil, drawing back, "it is none of my business. But I warn you, Mr. Berwin, that others are more curious than I am. Several times people have been known to be in your house while you were absent; and your mode of life, secretive and strange, does not commend itself to the householders in this neighbourhood. If you persist in giving rise to gossip and scandal, some busybody may bring the police on the scene."

"The police," echoed the old man,

CHAPTER III

AN UNSATISFACTORY EXPLANATION

"MR. BERWIN!" cried Lucian, recognising the man. "Is it you?"

"Who else should it be?" replied Berwin, bending forward to see who had jostled him. "Who else should it be, Mr. Denzil?"

"But I thought—I thought," said the barrister, unable to conceal his surprise, "that is, I fancied you were indoors."

now greatly alarmed, as would appear from his shaking voice. "No! no! that will never do. My house is my castle; the police dare not break into it. I am a peaceful and very unfortunate gentleman, who wishes to live quietly. All this talk of people being in my house is nonsense."

"Yet you seemed afraid when I told you of the shadows," said Lucian, pointedly.

"Afraid! I am afraid of nothing."

"Not even of those who are after you," hinted Denzil, recalling the conversation of the previous occasion.

Berwin gave a kind of eldritch shriek and stepped back a pace, as though to place himself on his guard. "What—what do you know about such—such things?" he panted.

"Only so much as you hinted at when I last saw you."

"Yes! yes! I was not myself on that night. The wine was in and the wit was out."

"The truth also, it would seem," said Lucian drily, "judging by your agitation then and now."

"I am an unfortunate gentleman," whimpered Berwin tremulously.

"If you will excuse me, sir, I shall leave you," said Lucian ceremoniously. "It seems to be my fate to hold midnight conversations with you in the cold; but I think this one had better be cut short."

"One moment," Mr. Berwin exclaimed. "You have been good enough to place me on my guard as to the talk my quiet course of life is causing. Pray add to your kindness by coming with me to my house and exploring it from attic to basement. You will then see that there are no grounds for scandal, and that the shadows you fancy you saw on the blind are not those of real people."

"They can't be those of ghosts at all events," replied Lucian, "as I never heard, to my knowledge, that spirits could cast shadows."

"Well, come and see for yourself that the house is empty."

Warmly as this invitation was given,

Lucian had some scruples about accepting it. To explore an almost unfurnished mansion with a complete stranger—and one with an ill-reputation—at the midnight hour is not an enterprise to be coveted by any man, however bold he may be. Still, Lucian had ample courage and more curiosity, for the adventure, as the chance of it stirred up that desire for romance which belongs peculiarly to youth. Also he was anxious to satisfy himself concerning the blind shadows, and curious to learn why Berwin inhabited so dismal and mysterious a mansion. Add to these reasons a keen pleasure in profiting by the occurrence of the unexpected, and you will guess that Denzil ended by accepting the strange invitation of Berwin.

Being now fully committed to the adventure, he went forward with cool courage and an observant eye, to spy out, if possible, the secret upon which hinged these mysteries.

As on the former occasion, Berwin inducted his guest into the sitting room, and here, as previously, a dainty supper was spread. Berwin turned up the lamp-light and waved his hand round the luxuriously furnished room, pointing particularly to the space between table and window.

"The figures whose shadows you saw," said he, "must have struggled together in this space, so as to be between the lamp and the blind for the performance of their pantomime. But I would have you observe, Mr. Denzil, that there is no disturbance of the furniture to show that such a struggle as you describe took place; also that the curtains are drawn across the window, and no light could have been thrown on the blind."

"The curtains were no doubt drawn after I rang the bell," said Lucian, glancing towards the heavy folds of crimson velvet which veiled the window.

"The curtains," retorted Berwin stripping off his coat, "were drawn by me before I went out."

Lucian said nothing, but shook his head doubtfully. Evidently Berwin was trying, for his own ends, to talk him into a belief that his eyes had deceived him ; but Denzil was too clear-headed a young man to be so gullied. Berwin's explanations and excuses only confirmed the idea that there was something in the man's life which cut him off from humanity, and which would not bear the light of day. Hitherto Lucian had heard rather than seen Berwin ; but now, in the clear light of the lamp, he had an excellent opportunity of observing both the man and his quarters.

Berwin was of medium height and lean, with a clean-shaven face, hollow cheeks, and black sunken eyes. His hair was grey and thin, his looks wild and wandering, and the hectic colouring of his face and narrow chest showed that he was far gone in consumption. Even as Lucian looked at him he was shaken by a hollow cough, and when he withdrew his handkerchief from his lips, the white linen was spotted with blood.

He was in evening dress, and looked eminently refined, although worn and haggard in appearance. Denzil noted two peculiar marks about him ; the first a serpentine cicatrice extending on the right cheek from lip almost to ear ; the second the loss of the little finger of the left hand, which was cut off at the first joint. As he examined the man, a second and more violent fit of coughing shook him from head to foot.

" You seem to be very ill," said Lucian, pitying the feebleness of the poor creature.

" Dying of consumption—one lung gone," gasped Berwin. " It will soon be over—the sooner the better."

" With your health, Mr. Berwin, it is sheer madness to dwell in this rigorous English climate."

" No doubt," replied the man, pouring himself out a tumbler of claret, " but I can't leave England, I can't leave this house even ; but on the whole," he added, with a satisfied

glance round, " I am not badly lodged."

Lucian agreed with this speech. The room was furnished in the most luxurious manner. The prevailing hue was a deep warm red—carpet, walls, hangings and furniture were all of this cheerful tint. The chairs were deep and softly cushioned ; on the walls were several oil-paintings by celebrated modern artists ; there were dwarf bookcases filled with well-chosen books ; and on a small bamboo table near the fire lay magazines and papers.

The mantelpiece, reaching nearly to the ceiling, was of oak, framing mirrors of bevelled glass ; and on the numerous shelves cups, saucers and vases of old and valuable china were placed. There was also a gilt clock, a handsome sideboard, and a neat smoking-table, on which stood a cut-glass spirit stand and a box of cigars. The whole apartment was furnished with taste and refinement ; and Lucian saw that the man who owned such luxurious quarters must be possessed of money, as well as the capability of using it in the most civilised way.

" You have certainly all that the heart of man can desire in the way of material comforts," said he, looking at the supper table, which, with its silver and crystal and spotless covering, glittered like a jewel under the brilliant lamplight. " My only wonder is that you should furnish one room so finely and leave the others bare."

" My bedroom and bath-room are yonder," replied Berwin, pointing towards large folding doors draped with velvet curtains, and placed opposite to the window. " They are as well furnished as this. But how do you know the rest of this house is bare ? "

" I can hardly help knowing it, Mr. Berwin. Your contrast of poverty and riches is an open secret in this neighbourhood."

" No one has been in my house save yourself, Mr. Denzil."

"Oh, I have said nothing. You turned me out so quickly the other night that I had no time for observation. Besides, I am not in the habit of remarking on matters which do not concern me."

"I beg your pardon," said Berwin weakly. "I had no intention of offending you. I suppose Mrs. Kebby has been talking?"

"I should think it probable."

"The skirling Jezebel!" cried Berwin. "I'll pack her off right away."

"Are you a Scotchman?" asked Denzil suddenly.

"Why do you ask?" demanded Berwin, without replying.

"You used an essentially Scotch word—'skirling'."

"And I used an essentially American phrase—'right away,'"—retorted he man. "I may be a Scot, I may be a Yankee; but I would remind you that my nationality is my own secret."

"I have no wish to pry into your secrets," said Denzil, rising from the chair in which he had seated himself, "and in my turn I would remind you that I am here at your invitation."

"Don't take offence at a hasty word," said Berwin nervously. "I am glad of your company although I seem rather brusque. You must go over the house with me."

"I see no necessity to do so."

"It will set your mind at rest regarding the shadows on the blind."

"I can trust my eyes," said Lucian drily, "and I am certain that before I met you a man and a woman were in this room."

"Well," said Berwin, lighting a small lamp, "come with me and I'll prove that you are mistaken."

CHAPTER IV

MRS. KEBBY'S DISCOVERY

THE pertinacity which Berwin displayed in insisting that Lucian should explore the Silent House was truly remarkable. He appeared to be bent upon banishing the idea which Denzil entertained, that strangers were hiding in the mansion.

From attic to basement, from front to back premises, he led the way, and made Lucian examine every corner of the empty rooms. He showed him even the unused kitchen, and bade him remark that the door leading into the yard was locked and bolted, and, from the rusty condition of the ironwork, could not have been opened for years. Also he made him look out of the window into the yard itself, with its tall black fence dividing it from the other properties.

This exploration finished, and Lucian being convinced that himself and his host were the only two living beings in the house, Berwin conducted his half-frozen guest back to the warm sitting-room and poured out a glass of wine.

"Here, Mr. Denzil," said he in good-natured tones, "drink this and draw near the fire; you must be chilled to the bone after our Arctic expedition."

Lucian willingly accepted both these attentions, and sipped his wine—it was particularly fine claret—before the fire, while Berwin coughed and shivered and muttered to himself about the cold of the season. When Lucian stood up to take his departure, he addressed him, directly.

"Well, sir," said he with a sardonic smile, "are you convinced that the struggling shadows on yonder blind were children of your heated fancy?"

"No," said Denzil stoutly, "I am not!"

" Yet you have seen that there is no one in the house ! "

" Mr. Berwin," said Lucian, after a moment's thought, " you propose a riddle which I cannot answer and which I do not wish to answer. I cannot explain what I saw to-night ; but as surely as you were out of this house, some people were in it. How this affects you, or what reason you have for denying it, I do not ask. Keep your own secrets, and go your own way. I wish you good-night, sir," and Lucian moved towards the door.

Berwin, who was holding a full tumbler of rich strong port, drank the whole of it in one gulp. The strong liquor reddened his pallid face and brightened his sunken eyes ; it even strengthened his already sonorous voice.

" At least you can inform my good neighbours that I am a peaceful man, desirous of being left to lead my own life," he said urgently.

" No, sir ! I will have nothing to do with your business. You are a stranger to me, and our acquaintance is too slight to warrant my discussing your affairs. Besides," added Lucian, with a shrug, " they do not interest me."

" Yet they may interest the three kingdoms one day," said Berwin softly.

" Oh, if they deal with danger to society," said Denzil thinking his strange neighbour spoke of anarchistic schemes, " I would——"

" They deal with danger to myself," interrupted Berwin. " I am a hunted man, and I hide here from those who wish me ill. I am dying, as you see," he cried, striking his hollow chest, " but I may not die quickly enough for those who desire my death."

" Who are they ?" cried Lucian, rather startled by this outburst.

" People with whom you have no concern," replied the man sullenly.

" That is true enough, Mr. Berwin, so I'll say good-night."

" Berwin ! Berwin ! ha ! ha ! a

very good name, Berwin, but not for me. Oh, was there ever so unhappy a creature as I. False name, false friend, in disgrace, in hiding. Curse everybody. Go ! go, Mr. Denzil, and leave me to die here like a rat in its hole."

" You are ill," said Lucian, amazed by the man's fury. " Shall I send a doctor to see you ? "

" Send no one," cried Berwin, commanding himself by a visible effort. " Only go away and leave me to my self. ' Thou can't not minister to a mind diseased.' Go ! go ! "

" Good-night, then," said Denzil, seeing that nothing could be done. " I hope you will be better in the morning."

Berwin shook his head, and with a silent tongue, which contrasted strangely with his late outcry, ushered Denzil out of the house.

As the heavy door closed behind him Lucian descended the steps and looked thoughtfully at the grim mansion, which was tenanted by so mysterious a person. He could make nothing of Berwin—as he chose to call himself—he could see no meaning in his wild words and mad behaviour ; but as he walked briskly back to his lodgings he came to the conclusion that the man was nothing worse than a tragic drunkard, haunted by terrors engendered by over-indulgence in stimulants. The episode of the shadows on the blind he did not attempt to explain, for the simple reason that he was unable to find any plausible explanation to account there for.

" And why should I trouble my head to do so ?" mused Lucian as he went to bed. " The man and his mysteries are nothing to me. Bah ! I have been infected by the vulgar curiosity of the Square. Henceforth I'll neither see nor think of this drunken lunatic," and with such resolve he dismissed all thoughts of his strange acquaintance from his mind, which, under the circumstances, was perhaps the wisest thing he could do.

But later on certain events took place which forced him to alter his determination. Fate, with her own ends to bring about, is not to be denied by her puppets ; and of these Lucian was one, designed for an important part in the drama which was to be played.

Mrs. Margery Kebby, who attended to the domestic economy of Berwin's house, was a deaf old crone with a constant thirst, only to be assuaged by strong drink ; and a filching hand which was usually in every pocket save her own. She had neither kith nor kin, nor friends, nor even acquaintances ; but, being something of a miser, scraped and screwed to amass money she had no need for, and dwelt in a wretched little apartment in a back slum, whence she daily issued to work little and pilfer much.

Usually at nine o'clock she brought in her employer's breakfast from the Nelson Hotel, which was outside the Square, and while he was enjoying it in bed, after his fashion, she cleaned out and made tidy the sitting-room. Berwin then dressed and went out for a walk, despite Miss Greeb's contention that he took the air only at night like an owl, and during his absence Mrs. Kebby attended to the bedroom. She then went about her own business, which was connected with the cleaning of various other apartments, and only returned at mid-day and at night to lay the table for Berwin's luncheon and dinner, or rather dinner and supper, which were also sent in from the hotel.

For these services Berwin paid her well, and only enjoined her to keep a quiet tongue about his private affairs, which Mrs. Kebby usually did, until excited by too copious drams of gin, when she talked freely and unwisely to all the servants in the Square. It was to her observation and invention that Berwin owed his bad reputation.

Well known in every kitchen, Mrs. Kebby hobbled from one to the other gossiping about the various affairs of

her various employers ; and when absolute knowledge failed, she took to inventing details which did no small credit to her imagination. Also, she could tell fortunes by reading tea-leaves and shuffling cards, and was not above aiding the maid-servants in their small love affairs.

In short, Mrs. Kebby was a dangerous old witch, who a century back would have been burnt at the stake ; and the worst possible person for Berwin to have in his house. Had he known of her lying and prating she would not have remained an hour under his roof ; but Mrs. Kebby was cunning enough to steer clear of such a danger in the most dexterous manner. She had a firm idea that Berwin had, in her own emphatic phrase, "done something" for which he was wanted by the police, and was always on the look out to learn the secret of his isolated life, in order to betray him, or blackmail him, or get him in some way under her thumb. As yet she had been unsuccessful.

Deeming her a weak, quiet old creature, Berwin, in spite of his suspicious nature, entrusted Mrs. Kebby with the key of the front door, so that she could enter for her morning's work without disturbing him. The sitting-room door itself was not always locked, but Berwin usually bolted the portal of his bedroom, and had invariably to rise and admit Mrs. Kebby with his breakfast.

The same routine was observed each morning, and everything went smoothly. Mrs. Kebby had heard of the blind-shadows from several people, and had poked and pried about all over the house in the hope of arriving at some knowledge of the substantial flesh and blood figures which cast them. But in this quest, which was intended to put money into her own pocket, she failed entirely ; and during the whole six months of Berwin's tenancy she never saw a living soul in No. 13 save her employer ; nor could she ever find any evidence to show that Berwin had received visit

tors during her absence. The man was as great a mystery to Mrs. Kebby as he was to the square, in spite of her superior opportunities of learning the truth.

On Christmas Eve the old woman brought in a cold supper for Berwin as usual, making several journeys to and fro between hotel and house for that purpose. She laid the table, made up the fire, and before taking her leave asked Mr. Berwin if he wanted anything else.

"No, I think not," replied the man, who looked wretchedly ill. "You can bring my breakfast to-morrow."

"At nine, sir?"

"At the usual time," answered Berwin impatiently. "Go away!"

Mrs. Kebby gave a final glance round to see that all was in order, and shuffled out of the room as fast as her rheumatism would let her. As she left the house eight o'clock chimed from the steeple of a near church, and Mrs. Kebby, clinking her newly received wages in her pocket, hurried out of the square to do her Christmas marketing. As she went down the street which led to it, Blinders, a burly, ruddy-faced policeman, who knew her well, stopped to make an observation.

"Is that good gentleman of yours home, Mrs. Kebby?" he asked, in the loud tones used to deaf people.

"Oh, he's home," grumbled Mrs. Kebby ungraciously, "sittin' afore the fire like Solomon in all his glory. What d'ye want to know for?"

"I saw him an hour ago," explained Blinders, "and I thought he looked ill."

"So he do, like a corpse. What of that? We've all got to come to it some day. 'Ow d'ye know but what he won't be dead afore morning. Well, I don't care, he's paid me up till to-night. I'm going to enj'y myself, I am."

"Don't you get drunk, Mrs. Kebby, or I'll lock you up."

"Garn!" grunted the old beldame. "Wot's Christmas Eve for, if it ain't

for folk to enj'y theirselves. Y'are on duty early."

"I'm taking the place of a sick comrade, and I'll be on duty all night. That's my Christmas."

"Well! well! let every one enj'y hisself as he likes," muttered Mrs. Kebby, and shuffled off to the nearest public-house.

Here she began to celebrate the season, and afterwards went shopping, then she celebrated the season again, and later carried home her purchases to the miserable garret she occupied. In this den Mrs. Kebby, with the aid of gin and water, celebrated the season until she drank herself to sleep.

Next morning she woke in anything but an amiable mood, and had to fortify herself with an early drink before she was fit to go about her business.

It was almost nine when she reached the Nelson Hotel, and found the covered tray with Mr. Berwin's breakfast waiting for her, so she hurried with it to Geneva Square as speedily as possible, fearful of a scolding. Having admitted herself into the house, Mrs. Kebby took up the tray with both hands, and pushed open the sitting-room door with her foot. Here, at the sight which met her eyes, she dropped the tray with a crash, and let off a shrill yell.

The room was in disorder, the table was overturned, and amid the wreckage of glass and china lay Mark Berwin with outspread hands—stone-dead—stabbed to the heart.

CHAPTER V

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

NOWADAYS events, political, social, and criminal, crowd so closely on one another's heels, that what was formerly a nine days' wonder is scarcely marvelled at the same number of minutes. Yet in certain cases episodes of a mysterious or unexpected nature engage the attention of a careless world for a somewhat longer period, and provoke an immense amount of discussion and surmise. In this category may be placed the crime committed in Geneva Square ; for when the extraordinary circumstances of the case became known, much curiosity was manifested regarding the possible criminal and his motive for committing so apparently useless a crime.

To add to the wonderment of the public, it came out in the evidence of Lucian Denzil at the inquest that Berwin was not the real name of the victim ; so here the authorities were confronted with a threefold problem. They had first to discover the name of the dead man ; second to learn who it was had so foully murdered him ; and third, to find out the reason why the unknown assassin should have slain an apparently harmless man.

But these hidden things were not easily brought to light ; and the meagre evidence collected by the police failed to do away with any one of the three obstacles—at all events until after the inquest. When the jury brought in a verdict that the deceased had been violently done to death by some person or persons unknown, the twelve good men and true stated the full extent of knowledge gained by Justice in her futile scramble after clues. Berwin—so called—was dead, his assassin had melted

into thin air, and the Silent House had added a second legend to its already uncanny reputation. Formerly it had been simply haunted, now it was also blood-stained, and its last condition was worse than its first.

The dead man had been found stabbed to the heart by some long, thin, sharp-pointed instrument which the murderer had taken away with him—or perhaps her, as the sex of the assassin, for obvious reasons, could not be decided. Mrs. Kebby swore that she had left the deceased sitting over the fire at eight o'clock on Christmas Eve, and that he had then been fairly well, though far from enjoying the best of health. When she returned shortly after nine on Christmas morning the man was dead and cold. Medical aid was called in at the same time as the police were summoned ; and the evidence of the doctor who examined the body went to prove that Berwin had been dead at least ten hours, therefore he must have been assassinated between the hours of eleven and twelve of the previous night.

Search was immediately made for the murderer, but no trace could be found of him, nor could it be ascertained how he had entered the house. The doors were all locked, the windows were all barred, and neither at the back nor in the front was there any outlet left open whereby the man—if it was a man who had done the deed—could have escaped.

Blinders, the policeman on duty at the entrance of the square, gave evidence that he had been on duty there all night, and that although many servants and owners of houses belonging to the square had passed in from their Christmas marketings, yet no stranger had entered. The policeman knew every one, even to the errand-boys of the neighbourhood who brought parcels of Christmas goods, and in many cases had exchanged greetings with the passers-by ; but he was prepared to swear

and in fact did swear at the inquest, that no stranger either came into, or went out of, Geneva Square.

Also he deposed that when the tragic died away after midnight he had walked round the square, and had looked at every window, including that of No. 13, and had tried every door, also including that of No. 13, only to find that all was safe. Binders declared on oath that he had not on Christmas Eve the slightest suspicion of the horrid tragedy which had taken place in the Silent House during the time he was on duty.

When the police took possession of the body and mansion, search was made in bedroom and sitting-room for papers likely to throw light on the identity of the victim, but in vain. No letters or telegrams, or even writing of any kind, could be discovered ; there was no name in the dead man's books, no mark on his clothes, no initials on his linen.

The landlord of the house declared that the deceased had hired the mansion six months before, but had given no references, and as the landlord was glad to let the haunted No. 13 on any terms, he had not insisted upon having them. The deceased, said the landlord, had paid a month's rent in advance in ready money, and at the end of every month he had discharged his liability in the same way. He gave neither cheque nor notes, but paid always in gold, and beyond the fact that he called himself Mark Berwin, the landlord knew nothing about him.

The firm who had furnished the rooms made almost the same report, quite as meagre and unsatisfactory. Mr. Berwin—so the deceased had given his name—had ordered the furniture and had paid for it in gold. Altogether, in spite of every effort, the police were obliged to declare themselves beaten. They could not find out the name of the victim, and therefore were unable to learn his past life, or trace thereby if he had an enemy likely to harm him.

Beyond the report given by Lucian of his conversation with the man, which showed that Berwin certainly had some enemy whom he dreaded, there was nothing discovered to show reason for the committal of the crime.

Berwin—so called—was dead ; he was buried under his assumed name, and there—so far as the obtainable evidence went—was an end to the strange tenant of the Silent House. Gordon Link, the detective charged with the conduct of the case, confessed as much to Denzil.

"I do not see the slightest chance of tracing Berwin's past," said he to the barrister. "We are as ignorant about him as we are of the name of the assassin."

"Are you sure there is no clue, Mr. Link ?"

"Absolutely none ; even the weapon with which the crime was committed cannot be found."

"You have searched the house ?"

"Every inch of it, and with the result that I have found nothing. The surroundings of the case are most mysterious. If we do not identify the dead we cannot hope to trace the murderer. How the wretch got into the house is more than I can discover."

"It is strange," admitted Lucian thoughtfully, "yet in some secret way people were in the habit of entering the house, and Berwin knew as much ; not only that, but he protected them from curiosity by denying that they even existed."

"I don't quite follow you, Mr. Denzil."

"I allude to the shadows on the blind, which I saw myself a week before the murder took place. They were those of a man and a woman, and must have been cast by bodies of flesh and blood. Therefore two people must have been in Berwin's sitting-room on that night ; yet when I met Berwin—who was absent at the time—he denied that anyone could have entered his house without his knowledge. More, he actually in-

sisted that I should satisfy myself as to the truth of this by examining the house."

"Which you did?"

"Yes, but found nothing; yet," said Lucian with an air of conviction, "however the man and woman entered, they were in the house."

"Then the assassin must have come in by the same way; but where that way can be, or how it can be found, is more than I can say."

"Does the landlord know of any secret passage?"

"No! I asked him," replied the detective, "but he stated that houses nowadays were not built with secret passages. When Berwin denied that anyone was in the house, was he afraid, Mr. Denzil?"

"Yes, he seemed to be nervous."

"And he told you he had enemies?"

"He hinted that there were people who wished to see him dead. From the way he spoke and the language he used I am satisfied that he was hiding from the vengeance of someone."

"Vengeance!" repeated Link, raising his eyebrows. "Is not that word a trifle melodramatic?"

"Perhaps; but to my mind there is more melodrama in actual life than people fancy. However, Mr. Link," added Lucian, "I have come to certain conclusions. Firstly, that Berwin was in hiding; secondly, that he saw people secretly who entered in some way we cannot discover; and thirdly, that to solve the problem it will be necessary to look into the past life of the dead man."

"Your third conclusion brings us round to the point whence we started," retorted Link. "How am I to discover the man's past?"

"By learning who he is, and what is his real name."

"An easy task," said the detective sarcastically, "considering the meagre material upon which we have to work. And how is the business to be accomplished?"

"By advertisement."

"Advertisement!"

"Yes. I wonder the idea did not strike you before, seeing how often it is used in similar cases. Advertise a full description of the man who called himself Berwin, note his physical peculiarities and looks, and circulate such description by means of handbills and newspapers."

Link looked angry, and laughed rather contemptuously, as his professional pride was touched by the fact of being advised by an individual not of his calling.

"I am not so ignorant of my business as you think," he said sharply. "What you suggest has already been done. There are handbills describing the appearance of Berwin in every police office in the kingdom."

"In the newspapers also?" asked Lucian, nettled by the detective's tone.

"No; it is not necessary."

"I don't agree with you. Many people in private life are not likely to see your handbills. I don't pretend to advise, Mr. Link," he added in soothing tones, "but would it not be wise to use the medium of the daily papers?"

"I'll think of it," said Link, too jealous of his dignity to give way at once.

"Oh, I quite rely on your discretion," said Denzil hastily. "You know your own business best. But if you succeed in identifying Berwin, will you let me know?"

Link looked keenly at the young man.

"Why do you wish to know about the matter?" he asked.

"Out of simple curiosity. The case is so mysterious that I should like to watch you unravel it."

"Well," said Link, rather gratified by this tribute to his power, "I shall indulge your fancy."

The result of this conversation was that Lucian observed in the newspapers next day an advertisement describing the looks and name, and

physical peculiarities of the deceased, with special mention of the loss of the left hand's little finger, and the strange cicatrice on the right cheek. Satisfied that the only way to learn the truth had been adopted by the authorities, Lucian impatiently waited for the development of the scheme.

Within the week he received a visit from the detective.

"You were right and I was wrong, Mr. Denzil," admitted Link generously; "the newspapers were of more use than the handbills. Yesterday I received a letter from a lady, who is coming to see me to-morrow at my office. So if you care to be present at the interview you have only to say so."

"I should like it above all things," said Lucian eagerly. "Who is the lady?"

"A Mrs. Vrain, who writes from Bath."

"Can she identify the dead man?"

"She thinks she can, but of course she cannot be certain until she sees the body. Going by the description, however," added Link, "she is inclined to believe that Berwin was her husband."

in Geneva Square; who were the enemies he hinted at as desirous of his death; and in what manner and for what reason he had met with so barbarous a fate at their hands. It seemed likely that Mrs. Vrain, who asserted herself to be the wife of the deceased, would be able to answer these questions in full; therefore he was punctual in keeping the appointment at the office of Link.

He was rather astonished to find that Mrs. Vrain had arrived and was deep in conversation with the detective, while a third person, who had evidently accompanied her, sat near at hand, silent but attentive to what was being discussed. As the dead man had been close on sixty years of age, and Mrs. Vrain claimed to be his wife, Denzil had quite expected to meet with an elderly woman. Instead of doing so, however, he beheld a pretty young lady of not more than twenty-five, whose raiment of widow's weeds set off her beauty to the greatest advantage. She was a charming blonde, with golden hair and blue eyes, and a complexion of rose-leaf hue. In spite of her grief her demeanour was lively and engaging, and her smile particularly attractive, lighting up her whole face in the most fascinating manner. Her hands and feet were small, her stature was that of a fairy, and her figure was perfect in every way.

Altogether Mrs. Vrain looked like a sylph or a dainty shepherdess of Dresden china, and should have been arrayed in gossamer robes, rather than in the deep mourning she affected. Indeed, Lucian considered that such weeds were rather premature, as Mrs. Vrain could not yet be certain that the murdered man was her husband; but she looked so charming and childlike a creature that he forgave her being too eager to consider herself a widow. Perhaps with such an elderly husband her eagerness was natural.

From this charming vision Lucian's eyes wandered to the attentive

CHAPTER VI

MRS. VRAIN'S STORY

DENZIL was much pleased with the courtesy of the detective Link in permitting him to gain, at first hand, further details of this mysterious case. With a natural curiosity engendered by his short acquaintance with the unfortunate Berwin, he was most anxious to learn why the man had secluded himself from the world

third person, a rosy-cheeked, plump little man, of between fifty and sixty. From his resemblance to Mrs. Vrain—for he had the same blue eyes and pink-and-white complexion—Lucian guessed that he was her father, and such, indeed, proved to be the case. Link, on Lucian's entrance, introduced him to the sylph in black, who in her turn presented him to the silvery-haired, benevolent old man, whom she called Mr. Jabez Clyne.

At the first sound of their voices Lucian detected so pronounced a twang and so curious a way of collocating words as to conclude that Mrs. Vrain and her amiable parent hailed from the States. The little lady seemed to pride herself on this, and indicated her republican origin in her speech more than was necessary—at least Denzil thought so. But then on occasions he was disposed to be hypercritical.

"Say now," said Mrs. Vrain, casting an approving glance on Lucian's face, "I'm right-down glad to see you. Mr. Link here was just saying you knew my husband, Mr. Vrain."

"I knew him as Mr. Berwin—Mark Berwin," replied Denzil, taking a seat.

"Just think of that now," cried Mrs. Vrain, with a liveliness rather subdued in compliment to her apparel, "and his real name was Mark Vrain. Well, I guess he won't need no name now, poor man," and the widow touched her bright eyes carefully with a doll's pocket-handkerchief, which Lucian noted, somewhat cynically, was perfectly dry.

"Maybe he's an angel by this time, Lyddy," said Mr. Clyne in a cheerful chirping voice, "so it ain't no use wishing him back as I can see. We've all got to negotiate kingdom come some time or another."

"Not in the same way, I hope," said Lucian drily; "but I beg your pardon, Link, I interrupt your conversation."

"By no means" replied the detective

readily. "We had just begun when you entered, Mr. Denzil."

"And it wasn't much of a talk anyhow," said Mrs. Vrain. "I was only replying to some stupid questions."

"Stupid if you will, but necessary," observed Link with gravity. "Let us continue. Are you certain that this dead man is—or rather was—your husband?"

"I'm as sure as sure can be, sir. Berwin Manor is the name of our place near Bath, and it looks as though my husband called himself after it when he changed his colours. And isn't his first name Mark?" pursued the pretty widow. "Well, my husband was called Mark, too, so there you are—Mark Berwin."

"Is this all your proof?" asked Link calmly.

"I guess not, though it's enough, I should say. My husband had a mark on his right cheek—got it fighting a duel with a German student when he was having a high time as one of the boys at Heidelberg. Then he lost part of his little finger—left-hand finger—in an accident out West. What other proof do you want, Mr. Link?"

"The proofs you have given seem sufficient, Mrs. Vrain, but may I ask when your husband left his home?"

"About a year ago, eh, poppa?"

"You are overdoing it, Lyddy," corrected the father; "size it up as ten months and you'll do."

"Ten months!" said Lucian suddenly, "and Mr. Berwin—"

"Vrain!" struck in Lydia, the widow, "Mark Vrain!"

"I beg your pardon. Well, Mark Vrain took the house in Geneva Square six months back. Where was he during the other four?"

"Ask me something easier, Mr. Denzil. I know no more than you do."

"Did you not know where he went on leaving Berwin Manor?"

"Sakes, how should I?—Mark and I didn't pull together nohow, so he

kicked over the traces and made tracks for the back of beyond."

"And you might square it, Lyddy, by saying as 'twasn't you who upset the apple cart."

"Well, I should smile to think so," said Mrs. Vrain vigorously. "I was as good as pie to that old man."

"You did not get on well together?" said Link sharply.

"Got on as well as a cat hitched along with a dog. My stars! there was no living with him. If he hadn't left me, I'd have left him; that's an almighty truth."

"So the gist of all this is that Mr. Vrain left you ten months ago and did not leave his address?"

"That's so," said the widow calmly. "I've not seen nor heard of him for most a year, till pop there tumbled across your paragraph in the papers. Then I surmised from the name and the missing finger and the scarred cheek, that I'd dropped right on to Mark. I wouldn't take all this trouble for anyone else; no sir, not me!"

"My Lyddy does not care about being a grass-widow, gentlemen."

"I don't mind being a grass-widow or a real one, so long as I know how to ticket myself," said the candid Lydia; "but seems to me there's no question that Mark's sent in his checks."

"I certainly think that this man who called himself Berwin was your husband," said Denzil, for Mrs. Vrain's eyes rested on him, and she seemed to expect an answer.

"Well, then, that means I'm Mr. Vrain's widow?"

"I should say so!"

"And entitled to all his pile?"

"That depends on the will," said Lucian drily, for the light tone of the pretty woman jarred upon his ear.

"Oh, that's all right," replied Mrs. Vrain, putting a gold-topped smelling bottle to her nose. "I saw the will made and know exactly how I come out. The old man's daughter by his

first wife gets the manor and the rents, and I take the assurance money!"

"Was Mr. Berwin—I beg pardon, Vrain—was he married twice?"

"I should think so!" said Lydia. "He was a widower with a grown-up daughter when I took him to church. Well, can I get this assurance money?"

"I suppose so," said Link, "provided you can prove your husband's death."

"Sakes alive!" cried Mrs. Vrain briskly. "Wasn't he murdered?"

"The man called Berwin was murdered."

"Well, sir," said the rosy-cheeked Clyne, with more sharpness than might have been expected from his peaceful aspect, "and ain't Berwin, Vrain?"

"It would seem so," replied Link coolly. "All your evidence goes to prove it, yet the assurance company may not be satisfied with the proof: I expect the grave will have to be opened, and the remains identified."

"Ugh!" said Mrs. Vrain with a shrug, "how disgusting. I mean," she added, colouring, as she saw that Lucian was rather shocked by her flippancy, "that sorry as I am for the old man, he wasn't a good husband to me, and corpses a week old ain't pleasant things to look on."

"Lyddy!" interposed Clyne, hastening to obliterate, if possible, the impression made on the two men by this foolish speech, "how you do go on. But you know your heart is better than your tongue."

"It was, to put up so long with Mr. Vrain," said Lydia resentfully; "but I'm honest if I'm nothing else. I guess I'm sorry that Vrain got stuck like a pig; but it wasn't my fault, and I've done my best to show respect by wearing black. But it is no good going on in this way, poppa, for I've no call to excuse myself to strangers. What I want to know is how I'm going to get the dollars."

"You'll have to see the assurance company about that," said Link

coldly ; " my business with you, Mrs. Vrain, is about this murder."

" I know nothing about it," retorted the widow. " I haven't set eyes on Mark for most a year."

" Have you any idea who killed him ?"

" I guess not. How should I ?"

" You might know if he had enemies."

" He," said Mrs. Vrain, with supreme contempt, " why, he hadn't backbone enough for folks to get riz at him. He was half-baked."

" Crazy that is," remarked Clyne ; " always thought the world was against him, and folk wanted to get quit of him."

" He said he had enemies," hinted Lucian.

" You bet ! He no doubt made out that all Europe was against him," said Clyne ; " that was my son-in-law all over. Lyddy and he had a tiff, just like other married couples, and he clears out to lie low in an out-of-the-way shanty in Pimlico. I tell you, gentlemen, that Vrain had a chip out of his head. He fancied things, he did ; but no one wanted to harm him that I know of."

" Yet he died a violent death," said Denzil gravely.

" That's a frozen fact, sir," cried Clyne, " and both Lyddy and I want to lynch the reptile as did it ; but we neither of us know who laid him out."

" I'm sure I don't," said Mrs. Vrain in a weeping voice. " Everyone that I knew was civil to him ; he had no one who wanted to kill him when he left Berwin Manor. Why he went away, or how he died, I can't say."

" If you want to know how he died," explained Link, " I can tell you : he was stabbed."

" So the journals said ; with a bowie !"

" No, not with a bowie," corrected Lucian, " but with some long, sharp instrument."

" A dagger ?" suggested Clyne.

" I should be even more precise,"

said Denzil slowly. " I should say a stiletto—an Italian stiletto."

" A stiletto," gasped Mrs. Vrain, whose delicate pink colour had faded to a chalky white. " Oh !—oh ! I—I—" and she fainted forthwith.

CHAPTER VII

THE ASSURANCE MONEY

MRS. VRAIN'S fainting fit was of no great duration, and she shortly recovered her senses, but not her sprightliness. Her excuse was that the long discussion of her husband's murder, and the too precise details related to her by Link before Denzil's arrival, had so wrought on her nerves as to occasion her temporary indisposition.

This reason, which was a trifle weak, since she seemed to bear her husband's loss with great stoicism, awakened suspicions in Lucian's mind as to her truthfulness. However, these were too vague and confused to be put into words, so the young man remained silent until Mrs. Vrain and her father departed. This they did almost immediately ; after the widow had given her London and country address to the detective, in case he should require her in the conduct of the case.

This matter being attended to, she left the room with a parting smile and especial bow to Lucian.

Link smiled in his turn as he observed this Parthian shaft, the shooting of which was certainly out of keeping with Mrs. Vrain's character of a mourning widow.

" You seem to have made an impression on the lady, Mr. Denzil," he

said, with a slight cough to conceal his amusement.

"Nonsense!" replied Lucian, his fair face crimsoning with vexation. "She seems to me one of those shallow women who would sooner flirt with a tinker than pass unnoticed by the male sex. I don't like her," he concluded with some abruptness.

"On what grounds?"

"Well, she spoke very hardly about her husband, and seemed rather more concerned about this assurance money than his death. She is a flippant doll, with a good deal of the adventuress about her. I don't think," said the barrister significantly, "that she is altogether so ignorant of this matter as she pretends to be."

The detective raised his eyebrows. "You don't propose to accuse her of the murder?" he asked sceptically.

"Oh, no," answered Denzil hastily. "I don't say she is as guilty as all that; but she knows something, or suspects something."

"How do you make that out?"

"She fainted at the mention of stiletto; and I am convinced that Vrain—as I suppose we must call him now—was killed with one. And again, Link, this woman admitted that she had married her elderly husband in Florence. Now, Florence, as you know, is an Italian town; a stiletto is an Italian weapon. Putting these two things together, what do you make of Mrs. Vrain's fainting?"

"I make nothing of it, Mr. Denzil. You are too suspicious. The woman had no reason to rid herself of her husband as you hint."

"What about the assurance money?"

"There is a motive there, certainly—a motive of gain. Still, I think you are making a mountain out of a molehill; for I am satisfied that she knows no more who committed the crime than does the Pope himself."

"It is as well to look in every direction," said Lucian obstinately.

"Meaning that I should follow this clue you suggest, which has no existence save in your own fancy. Well, I'll

keep my eye on Mrs. Vrain, you may be sure of that. It won't be difficult, as she will certainly stay in town until she identifies the body of her dead husband and gets the money. If she is guilty I'll track her down; but I am certain she has nothing to do with the crime. If she had, it is not likely that she would enter the lion's den by coming to see me. No, no, Mr. Denzil; you have found a mare's nest."

Lucian shrugged his shoulders, and took up his hat to go.

"You may be right," said he reluctantly, "but I have my doubts of Mrs. Vrain, and shall continue to have them until she supplies a more feasible explanation of her fainting. In the meantime I'll leave you to follow out the case in the manner you judge best. We shall see who is right in the long run," and Denzil, still holding to his opinion, took his departure, leaving Link confident that the young man did not know what he was talking about.

As the detective sat thinking over the late conversation, and wondering if he could shape any definite course out of it, Denzil put his head in at the door.

"I say, Link," he called out, "you'd better find out if Mrs. Vrain is really the wife of this dead man before you are guided by her story," after which speech he hurriedly withdrew, leaving Link to digest it at his leisure.

At first Link was indignant that Denzil should deem him so easily hoodwinked as the speech implied. Afterwards he began to laugh.

"Wife!" said he to himself. "Of course she is the man's wife. She knows too much about him to be otherwise; but even granting that Denzil is right—which I don't for a moment admit—there is no need for me to prove the truth of his assumption. If this pretty woman is not the true wife of Berwin, or Vrain, or whatever this dead man's name actually may be, the assurance company will get at the rights of the matter before paying over the money."

Subsequent events reflected credit on this philosophical speech and determination of Mr. Link. Had Mrs. Vrain been an impostor her house of cards would have been knocked down as soon as reared by the searching inquiry instituted by the Sirius Assurance Company. It appeared that the life of the late Mark Vrain was on the books of the company for no less a sum than twenty thousand pounds ; and under the will this was to be paid over to Lydia Vrain, *née* Clyne. The widow, aided by her father—who was a shrewd business man in spite of his innocent looks—and the family lawyer of the Vrains, went systematically to work to establish her own identity, the death of her husband, and her consequent right to the money.

The first thing to be done was to prove that the dead man was really Vrain. There was some little difficulty in obtaining an order from the authorities for the opening of the grave and the exhumation of the body ; but finally the consent of those in power was obtained, and there was little difficulty in the identification of the remains. The lawyer, Mr. Clyne, Mrs. Vrain herself, and several people brought up from Bath by the assurance company, swore that the corpse—buried under the false name of Berwin—was that of Mark Vrain, for decomposition had not proceeded so far but what the features could be recognised. There was even no need to unwrap the body from its cermements, as the face itself and the scar thereon were quite sufficient for the friends of the deceased to swear to the corpse. Thereupon the assurance company, on the fullest of evidence, was compelled to admit that their client was dead, and expressed themselves ready to pay over the money to Mrs. Vrain as soon as the will should be proved.

Pending the legal process necessary to do this, the widow made a great parade of her grief and affection for the dead man. She had the body enclosed in a new and sumptuous

coffin; and removed the same to Berwin Manor, near Bath, where, after a short lapse of time, it was duly placed in the family vault of the Vrains.

The widow, having thus disposed of her husband, bethought herself of her step-daughter, who at that time was on a visit to some friends in Australia. A long letter, giving full details, was despatched by Mrs. Vrain, and the daughter was requested, both by the widow and the lawyer, to come back to England at once and take up her abode in Berwin Manor, which, with its surrounding acres, had been left to her under the will.

Matters connected with the death and its consequences having been disposed of thus far, Mrs. Vrain sat down and, folding her hands, waited till such time as she would receive the assurance money, and begin a new life as a wealthy and fascinating widow. Everyone said that the little woman had behaved very well, and that Vrain—weak-headed as he was supposed to be—had shown excellent judgment in dividing his property, real and personal, so equally between the two claimants. Miss Vrain, as became the child of the first wife, received the home and acres of her ancestors ; while the second wife obtained the assurance money, which everyone candidly admitted she quite deserved for having sacrificed her youth and beauty to an old man like Vrain. In those days, when all these details were being settled, the widow was the most popular personage in Bath.

Matters went smoothly with Mrs. Vrain in every respect. The will was duly proved, the twenty thousand pounds was duly paid over ; so, finding herself rich, the widow came with her father to take up her abode in London. When settled there one of her first acts was to send a note to Lucian, telling him that she was in town. The good looks of the young man had made a considerable impression on Mrs. Vrain, and she appeared anxious to renew the acquaintance,

although it had been so inauspiciously begun in the purlieus of the police courts.

On his part Lucian lost no time in paying his respects, for after the searching inquiry conducted by the Sirius Assurance Company, out of which ordeal Mrs. Vrain had emerged unscathed, he began to think that he had been too hasty in condemning the little widow. So he called upon her almost immediately after receiving the invitation, and found her, after the lapse of three months, as pretty as ever, and clothed in less heavy mourning.

"It's real sweet of you to call, Mr. Denzil," said she vivaciously. "I haven't seen anything of you since we met in Mr. Link's office. And sakes! have I not had a heap of trouble since then?"

"Your trouble has done you no harm, Mrs. Vrain. So far as your looks go, three minutes rather than three months might have passed."

"Oh, that's all right. I guess it's not good enough to cry oneself sick for what can't be helped. But I want to ask you, Mr. Denzil, how that policeman is progressing with the case."

"He has found out nothing," replied Lucian, shaking his head, "and, so far as I can see, there's not much chance of learning the truth."

"I never thought there was," said Mrs. Vrain, with a shrug. "Seems to me you don't get round much in this old country. Well, it don't seem as I can do much more. I've told all I know, and I've offered a reward of £500 to discover the man who stuck Mark. If he ain't found for dollars he won't be found at all."

"Probably not, Mrs. Vrain. It is now over three months since the crime was committed, and every day makes the chance of discovery less."

"But for all that, Diana Vrain's going on the trail, Mr. Denzil."

"Diana Vrain! Who is she?"

"My step-daughter, Mark's only child. She was in Australia—out in

the wild west of that country—and only lately got the news of her father's death. I got a letter from her last week, and it seems as she's coming back here to find out who laid her poppa out."

"I am afraid she'll not succeed," said Denzil dubiously.

"She'll do her best to," replied Mrs. Vrain, with a shrug. "She's as obstinate as a battery mule; but it's no use talking, she will have her own way;" and, dismissing the subject of Miss Vrain, the pretty widow, with an air of relief, talked on more frivolous subjects until Lucian took his departure.

CHAPTER VIII

DIANA VRAIN

ALTHOUGH over three months had elapsed since the murder of Mark Vrain, and the crime had been relegated to oblivion both by press and people, curiosity concerning it was still active in Geneva Square. The gossips in that talkative quarter had exhausted their tongues and imagination in surmising who had committed the deed, and how it had been accomplished.

It was now known that the deceased had been of a good county family, who had left his pretty young wife in a fit of groundless suspicion; that he had no enemies; and had withdrawn to the Silent House to save himself from the machinations of purely imaginary beings. The general opinion was that Vrain had been insane; but even this did not explain the reason of his tragic and unforeseen death.

Since the murder, the Silent House had acquired a tenfold interest in the eyes of all. The crime, added to its reputation for being haunted, invested it with horror ; and its common place looks assumed to fanciful onlookers a grim and menacing aspect, in keeping with its blood-stained floor and ghostly rooms.

Disheartened by the late catastrophe, which had so greatly enhanced the already evil reputation of the house, the landlord did not attempt to re-let it, as he knew very well that no tenant would be bold enough to take it even at a nominal rent. Mrs. Vrain had sold off the furniture of the two apartments which her unfortunate husband had inhabited ; and now these were as bare and lonely as the rest of the rooms.

The landlord made no effort to furnish up or renovate the mansion, deeming that such expense would be useless ; so No. 13, deserted by man and cursed by God, remained vacant and avoided. People came from far and near to look at it, but no one entered its doors lest some evil fate should befall them. Yet, in strange contradiction to the horror it created in every breast, the houses on either side continued to be occupied.

Miss Greeb frequently took a peep across the way at the empty house, with its curtainless, dusty windows and smokeless chimneys. She had theorised often on the murder of Vrain ; and being unable to come to any reasonable conclusion, finally decided that a ghost—the ghost which haunted the mansion—had committed the crime. In support of this fantastic opinion, she related to Lucian at least a score of stories, in which people foolishly sleeping in haunted rooms had been found dead in the morning.

“With black finger-marks on their throats,” said Miss Greeb dramatically, “and looks of horror in their eyes ; and everything locked up, just like it was in No. 13, to show that nothing but a ghost could have killed them.”

“You forget, Miss Greeb,” said Lucian flippantly, “poor Vrain was stabbed with a stiletto ; ghosts don’t use material weapons.”

“How do you know the dagger was a real one ?” replied Miss Greeb, sinking her voice to a horrified whisper. “Was it ever seen ? No ! Was it ever found ? No ! The ghost took it away. Depend upon it, Mr. Denzil, it wasn’t flesh and blood as made a spirit of that crazy Berwin.”

“In that case the ghostly criminal can’t be hanged,” said Denzil, with a laugh. “But it’s all nonsense, Miss Greeb. I am astonished that a woman of your sense should believe in such rubbish.”

“Wiser people than I have faith in ghosts,” retorted the landlady obstinately. “Haven’t you heard of the haunted house in a West-end square, where a man and a dog were found dead in the morning, with a valet as gibbered awful ever afterwards.”

“Pooh ! Pooh ! that’s a story of Bulwer Lytton’s.”

“It is not, Mr. Denzil—it’s a fact. You can see the very house in the square for yourself ; and No. 13 is just such another.”

“Nonsense ! Why I’d sleep in No. 13 to-morrow night, just to prove that your ghostly fears are all moonshine.”

Miss Greeb uttered a screech of alarm. “Mr. Denzil,” she cried with great energy, “sooner than you should do that I’d—I’d—well, I don’t know what I’d do.”

“Accuse me of stealing your silver spoons and have me locked up,” said Lucian laughing. “Make yourself easy, Miss Greeb, I have no intention of tempting Providence. All the same, I don’t believe for one minute that No. 13 is haunted.”

“Lights have been seen flitting from room to room.”

“No doubt. Poor Vrain showed me over the house before he died. His candle explains the lights.”

"They have been seen since his death," said Miss Greeb solemnly.

"Then, as a ghost, Vrain must be walking about with the old woman phantom who wears brocade and high-heeled shoes."

Miss Greeb, seeing that she had a sceptic to deal with, retreated with great dignity from the argument, but nevertheless to other people maintained her opinion, with many facts drawn from her imagination and from books on the supernatural compiled from the imagination—or, as the various writers called it—the experience of others. Some agreed with her, others laughed at her; but one and all acknowledged that, however it came about, whether by ghostly or mortal means, the murder of Vrain was a riddle never likely to be solved; and, with other events of a like nature and mystery, it was relegated to the list of undiscovered crimes.

After several interviews with Link, the barrister was also inclined to take this view of the matter. He found the detective quite discouraged in his efforts to find the assassin.

"I have been to Bath," said Link dismally. "I have examined, so far as I was able, into the past life of Vrain, but I can find nothing likely to throw light on the subject. He did not get on well with his wife, and left Bath ten months before the murder. I tried to trace where he went to, but could not. He vanished from Bath quite unexpectedly, and four months later turned up in Geneva Square, as we know, but who killed him, or why he was killed, I can't say. I'm afraid I'll have to give it up as a bad job, Mr. Denzil."

"What! and lose a reward of five hundred pounds," said Lucian.

"If it was five thousand I must lose it," returned the dejected Link. "This case beats me. I don't believe the murderer will ever be run down."

"Upon my word I am inclined to agree with you," said Denzil; and barrister and detective departed, each convinced that the Vrain case was

ended, and that in the face of the insuperable obstacles presented by it there was not the slightest chance of avenging the murder of the unfortunate man. The reading of the mystery was beyond mortal powers to accomplish.

About the middle of April, nearly four months after the tragedy, Lucian received a letter containing an invitation which caused him no little astonishment. The note was signed Diana Vrain, and having intimated that the writer had returned only that week from Australia, requested that Mr. Denzil would be kind enough to call the next day at the Royal John Hotel in Kensington. Miss Vrain ended by stating that she had a particular desire to converse with Mr. Denzil, and hoped that he would not fail to keep the appointment.

Wondering greatly how the lady—who was no doubt the step-daughter referred to by Mrs. Vrain—had obtained his address, and why she desired to see him so particularly, Lucian, out of sheer curiosity, obeyed the summons. Next day at four o'clock—the appointed hour—he presented himself as requested, and on giving his name, was shown immediately into the presence of his correspondent, who occupied a small private sitting-room.

When Miss Vrain rose to greet him, Lucian was amazed to see how beautiful and stately she was. With dark hair and eyes, oval face and firm mouth, majestic figure and imperial gait, she moved towards him an apparent queen. A greater contrast to Mrs. Vrain than her step-daughter can scarcely be imagined: the one was frivolous, volatile fairy, the other a dignified and reserved woman. She also was arrayed in black garments, but these were made in the plainest manner, and showed none of the coquetry of woe such as had characterised Mrs. Vrain's elaborate costume. The look of sorrow on the face of Diana was in keeping with

her mourning apparel; and she welcomed Lucian with a subdued courtesy which prepossessed him greatly in her favour.

Quick in his likes and dislikes, the young man was as drawn towards this beautiful, sad woman as formerly he had been repulsed by the feigned grief and ensnaring glances of silly Mrs. Vrain.

"I am much obliged to you for calling, Mr. Denzil," said Miss Vrain in a deep voice, rather melancholy in its tone. "No doubt you wondered how I obtained your address."

"It did strike me as peculiar I confess," said Lucian taking a chair, to which she pointed, "but on considering the matter I fancied that Mrs. Vrain had—"

"Mrs. Vrain!" echoed Diana in a tone of contempt. "No! I have not seen Mrs. Vrain since I returned a week ago to London. I got your address from the detective who examined into the death of my most unhappy father."

"You have seen Link?"

"Yes, and I know all that Link could tell me. He mentioned your name frequently in his narrative, and gave me to understand that on two occasions you had spoken with my father; therefore I asked him to give me your address, so that I might speak with you personally on the matter."

"I am quite at your service, Miss Vrain. I suppose you wish to learn all that I know of the tragedy."

"I wish for more than that, Mr. Denzil," said Diana quietly. "I wish you to help me in hunting down the assassin of my father."

"What! do you intend to re-open the case?"

"Certainly; but I did not know that the case—as you call it—had been closed. I have come home from Australia especially to devote myself to this matter. I should have been in London long ago, but that, out in Australia, I was with some friends in a

part of the country where it is difficult to get letters. As soon as Mrs. Vrain's letter about the terrible end of my father came to hand, I arranged my affairs, and left at once for England. Since my arrival I have seen Mr. Saker, our family lawyer, and Mr. Link, the detective. They have told me all they know, and now I wish to hear what you have to say."

"I am afraid I cannot help you, Miss Vrain," said Lucian dubiously.

"Ah, you refuse to help me?"

"Oh, no, no. I shall only be too glad to do what I can," protested Lucian, shocked that she should think him so hard-hearted, "but I know of nothing likely to solve the mystery. Both myself and Link have done our best to discover the truth, but without success."

"Well, Mr. Denzil," said Diana after a pause, "they often say that a woman's wit can do more than a man's logic; so you and I must put our heads together and discover the guilty person. Have you no suspicion?"

"No. I have no suspicion," replied Lucian frankly. "Have you?"

"I have! I suspect—a lady."

"Mrs. Vrain?"

"Yes; how do you know I meant her?"

"Because at one time I suspected her myself."

"You suspected rightly," replied Diana. "I believe that Mrs. Vrain killed her husband."

CHAPTER IX

A MARRIAGE THAT WAS A FAILURE

DENZIL did not reply at once to the accusation levelled by Diana at Mrs. Vrain, as he was too astonished at her vehemence to find his voice readily. When he did speak it was to argue on the side of the pretty widow.

"I think you must be mistaken," he said at length.

"But, Mr. Denzil, you declared that you suspected her yourself."

"At one time, but not now," replied Lucian decisively, "because at the time of the murder Mrs. Vrain was keeping Christmas in Berwin Manor."

"Like Nero fiddling when Rome was burning," retorted Diana sharply; "but you mistake my meaning. I do not say that Mrs. Vrain committed the crime personally, but she inspired and guided the assassin."

"And who is the assassin in your opinion?"

"Count Hercule Ferruci."

"An Italian!"

"As you may guess from the name."

"Now, that is strange," cried Lucian with some excitement, "for, from the nature of the wound, I believe that your father was stabbed by an Italian stiletto."

"Aha!" said Diana with satisfaction. "That strengthens the accusation I bring against Ferruci."

"And, again," continued Denzil, hardly listening to what she was saying, "when I mentioned my suspicion about the stiletto in the hearing of Mrs. Vrain, she fainted."

"Which showed that her guilty conscience pricked her. Oh, I am sure of it, Mr. Denzil. My step-mother and the count are the criminals."

"Our evidence as yet is only circumstantial," said Lucian cautiously.

"We must not jump to conclusions. At present I am completely in the dark regarding this foreigner."

"I can enlighten you, but it is a long story."

"The longer the better," said Denzil, thinking he could hear Diana speak and watch her face for hours without weariness. "I wish for all details; then I shall be in a better position to judge."

"What you say is only reasonable, Mr. Denzil. I shall tell you my father's history from the time he went to Italy some three years ago. It was in Italy—to be precise, in Florence—that he met with Lydia Clyne and her father."

"One moment," said Denzil. "Before you begin, will you tell me what you think of the couple?"

"Think," cried Diana disdainfully. "I think they are a couple of adventurers; but she is the worst of the two. The old man, Jabez Clyne, I think moderately well of; he is a weak fool under the thumb of his daughter. If you only knew what I have suffered at the hands of that golden-haired doll."

"I should think you could hold your own, Miss Vrain."

"Not against treachery and lies," retorted Diana fiercely. "It is not my habit to employ such weapons, but my step-mother used no others. It was she who drove me out of the house, and made me exile myself to the Antipodes to escape her falseness. And it was she," added Miss Vrain solemnly, "who treated my father so ill as to drive him out of his own home. Lydia Vrain is not the doll you think her to be; she is a false, cruel, clever adventuress, and I hate her—I hate her with all my heart and soul."

This feminine outburst of anger rather bewildered Denzil, who saw very plainly that Diana was by no means the lofty angel he had taken her to be in the first appreciation of her beauty. But her passion of the moment suited so well with her stately looks, that she seemed rather a Mar-

garet of Anjou defying York and his faction than an injured woman concerned with so slight a thing as the rebuke of one of her own sex for whom she had little love. Diana saw the surprise expressed on Lucian's face and her own flushed a little with annoyance that she should have betrayed her feelings so openly. With a vexed laugh she recovered her temper and composed demeanour.

"You see I am no saint, Mr. Denzil," she said, resuming her seat, for in her anger she had risen to her feet. "But even if I were one, I could not have restrained myself from speaking as I did. When you know my step-mother as well as I do—but I must talk calmly about her or you will not understand my reasons for thinking her concerned in the terrible fate of my poor father."

"I am all attention, Miss Vrain."

"I'll tell you all I know as concisely as possible," she replied, "and you can judge for yourself if I am right or wrong. Three years ago my father's health was very bad. Since the death of my mother—now some ten years—he had devoted himself to hard study and had lived more or less the life of a recluse in Berwin Manor. He was writing a history of the Elizabethan dramatists, and became so engrossed with the work that he neglected his health, and consequently there was danger that he might suffer from brain fever. The doctors ordered him to leave his books and to travel, in order that his attention might be distracted by new scenes and new people. I was to go with him, to see that he did not resume his studies, so, in an evil hour for us both, we went to Italy."

"Your father was not mad," said Lucian, thinking of the extraordinary behaviour of Vrain in the square.

"Oh, no," cried Diana indignantly. "He was a trifle weak in the head from overwork, but quite capable of looking after himself."

"Did he indulge in strong drink?"

Miss Vrain looked scandalised. "My father was singularly abstemious in

eating and drinking," she said stiffly. "Why do you ask such a question?"

"I beg your pardon," replied Lucian with all humility, "but it was reported in Geneva Square that Berwin—the name by which your father was known—drank too much; and when I met him he was certainly not—not quite himself," finished the barrister delicately.

"No doubt his troubles drove him to take more than was good for him," said Diana in a low voice. "Yet I wonder at it, for his health was none of the best. Sometimes, I admit, he took sleeping draughts and—and drugs."

"He was consumptive," said Lucian, noticing Diana's hesitation to speak plainly.

"His chest was weak, and consumption may have developed itself, but when I left England, almost two years back, he was certainly not suffering from that disease. But I see how it is," said Diana wringing her hands, "during my short absence and under the tyranny of his wife his physical health and moral principles gave way. Drink and consumption! Ah! God! were not these ills enough but what the woman must add murder to cap them both?"

"We do not know yet if she is guilty," said Lucian quietly. "Will you go on with your story, Miss Vrain; later on we can discuss these matters, when I am in possession of the facts. You say it was an evil hour when you went to Italy."

"It was indeed," said Diana sorrowfully, "for in Florence, at the Pension Donizetti, on the Lung Arno, we met with Lydia Clyne and her father. They had only lately arrived in Italy—from New York, I suppose—but already she was said to be engaged to a needy Italian nobleman named Hercule Ferruci."

"Then I suppose the Clynes were rich," said Lucian, "for I know those Italian nobles too well to suspect that this Count Ferruci would pay attention to any one but an heiress."

"She was supposed to be rich, Mr. Denzil. All Americans, for some reason, are supposed to be millionaires; but after she married my father I learned that Mr. Clyne had a very moderate fortune indeed, and his daughter nothing. It was for that reason that Lydia threw over the count, to whom she was almost engaged, and began to pay attention to my father. She heard talk of his estates in the gossip of the Pension, and believing him to be rich, she decided to marry him instead of throwing herself away in a romantic fit on Ferruci."

"Did she love this Italian?"

"Yes, I am sure she did; and what is more she loves him still."

"What! is Count Ferruci still acquainted with Mrs. Vrain?"

"He is, as you shall hear. Miss Clyne, as I said, determined to make a rich marriage by becoming the second Mrs. Vrain. I never liked her, knowing that she was false and frivolous; but though I did my best to stop the marriage, my father would not be controlled. You know that this woman is pretty and fascinating."

"She is certainly the first, but not the last," interposed Lucian.

"At all events," resumed Diana disconsolately, "she was sufficiently fascinating to snare my poor foolish old father. We remained four months in Florence, and before we left it Lydia Clyne became Mrs. Vrain. I could do nothing with my father, as he was possessed of the headstrong passion of an old man, and, moreover, Lydia had learned to know his weak points so well that she could twist him round her finger. But, angered as I was at my father's folly, I loved him too well to leave him at the time, therefore I returned to Berwin Manor with the pair.

"There, Mr. Denzil," continued Miss Vrain, her face growing dark, "Lydia made my life so wretched and insulted me so openly that I was forced, out of self-respect, to leave the house. I had some relatives in Australia, to whom

I went out on a visit. Alas! I wish I had not done so; yet remain with my colonial cousins I did, until recalled to England by the terrible intelligence of my father's untimely end."

"So the marriage was a failure?"

"Yes; even before I left Lydia openly neglected my father. I am bound to say that Mr. Clyne, who is much the better of the two, tried to make her conduct herself in a more becoming manner. But she defied him and every one else. After my departure I received letters from a friend of mine, who told me that Lydia had invited Count Ferruci over on a visit. My father, finding that he could do nothing, and seeing what a mistake he had made, returned to his books, and soon became ill again. Instead of looking after him, Lydia—as I heard—encouraged him to study hard, hoping, no doubt, that he would die, and that she would be free to marry Count Ferruci. Then my father left the house."

"Why? That is a very necessary detail."

Diana thought for a moment, then shook her head despondingly. "That I cannot explain," she said with a sigh, "as I was in Australia at the time. But I expect that his brain grew weaker with study, and perhaps with the strong drink and drugs which this woman drove him to take. No doubt the poor man grew jealous of Ferruci; and unable to assert himself, seeing how ill he was, left the house and retired to Geneva Square to meet his death as we know."

"But all this is supposition," remonstrated Lucian. "We really do not know why Mr. Vrain left the house."

"What does Lydia say?"

"She gives no feasible explanation."

"Nor will she. Oh!" cried Diana, "is there no way of getting at the truth of this matter? I feel certain that Lydia and the Count are guilty."

"You have no proofs," said Denzil, shaking his head.

"No proofs! why you said yourself that a stiletto—"

"That is a supposition on my part," interrupted Lucian quickly. "I cannot say for certain that the deed was committed with such a weapon. Besides, if it was, how can you connect the Italian with the deed?"

"Can we not find a proof?"

"I fear not."

"But if we search the house?"

"There is little use in doing that," rejoined Lucian. "However, if it will give you any satisfaction, Miss Vrain, I will take you over the house to-morrow morning."

"Do," cried Diana, "and we may find proof of Lydia's guilt in a way she little dreams of. Good-bye, Mr. Denzil—till to-morrow."

men like one in a dream. And dreamer he was, for there was no substantial basis for his passion.

Many people—particularly those without imagination—scoff at the idea that love can be borne in a moment, but such is often the case, for all their ill-advised jibes. A man may be brought into contact with the loveliest and most brilliant of women, yet remain heart-whole ; yet unexpectedly a face—not always the most beautiful—will fire him with sudden fervour even against his better judgment. Love is not an affair of reason, to be clipped and measured by logic and calculation, but a devouring destroying passion, impatient of restraint and utterly regardless of common sense. It is born of a look, of a smile, of a sigh, of a word ; it springs up and fructifies more speedily than did Jonah's gourd, and none can say how it begins or how it will end. It is the ever-old, ever-new riddle of creation, and the more narrowly its mystery is looked into, the more impossible does it become of solution. The lover of to-day, with centuries of examples at his back, is no wiser in knowledge than was his father Adam.

Although Lucian was thus stricken mad after the irrational methods of Cupid, he had sufficient sense not to examine too minutely into the reasons for this sudden passion. He was in love, and admitting as much to himself, there was an end of all argument. The long lane of his youthful and loveless life had turned in another direction at the sign-post of a woman's face, and down the new vista the lover saw flowering meadows, silver streams, bowers of roses, and all the landscape of Arcadia. He was a piping swain and Diana a complaisant shepherdess ; but they had not yet entered into the promised Arcadia, and might never do so unless Diana was as kindly as he wished her to be.

Lucian was in love with Diana, but as yet he could not flatter himself that she was in love with him, so he resolved to win her affection—if

CHAPTER X

THE PARTI-COLOURED RIBBON

THE beauty and high spirit of Diana made so deep an impression on Lucian that he determined to aid her by every means in his power in searching for the assassin of her father. As yet Denzil had reached the age of twenty-five without having been attracted in any marked degree towards woman-kind ; or, to put it more precisely, he had not yet been in love. But now it seemed that the hour which comes to all of Adam's sons had come to him ; for on leaving Diana he thought of nothing else but her lovely face and charming smile ; and, until he met her again, her image was never absent from his mind.

He took but a languid interest in his daily business or social pursuits, and wrapped up in inwardly contemplating the beauties of Diana, he appeared to move amongst his fellow-

it was free to be bestowed—by doing her will, and her will was to revenge the death of her father. This was hardly a pleasant task to Lucian in his then peace-with-all-the-world frame of mind ; but seeing no other way to gain a closer intimacy with the lady of his love, he took the bitter with the sweet and set his shoulder to the wheel.

The next morning, therefore, Lucian called on the landlord of No. 13 and requested the keys of the house. But it appeared that these were not in the landlord's keeping at the moment.

"I gave them to Mrs. Kebby, the charwoman," said Mr. Peacock, a retired grocer, who owned the greater part of the square. "The house is in such a state that I thought I'd have it cleaned up a bit."

"With a view to a possible tenant, I suppose?"

"I don't know," replied Peacock with a rueful shake of his bald head, "although I'm hoping against hope. But what with the murder and the ghost there don't seem much chance of letting it. What might you be wanting in No. 13, Mr. Denzil?"

"I wish to examine every room, to find if possible a clue to this crime," explained Lucian, suppressing the fact that he was to have a companion.

"You'll find nothing, sir. I've looked into every room myself. However, you'll find Mrs. Kebby cleaning up, and she'll let you in if you ring the bell. You aren't thinking of taking the house yourself, I suppose," added Peacock wishfully.

"No, thank you. My nerves are in good order just now ; I don't want to upset them by inhabiting a house with so evil a reputation."

"Ah, that's what everyone says," sighed the grocer. "I wish that Berwin, or Vrain, or whatever he called himself, had chosen some other place to be killed in."

"I'm afraid people who meet with unexpected deaths can't arrange these little matters beforehand," said Lucian drily, and walked away, leaving

the unfortunate landlord still lamenting over his unlucky possession of a haunted and bloodstained mansion.

Before going to No. 13, Lucian walked down the street leading into Geneva Square, in order to meet Diana, who was due at eleven o'clock. Punctual as the barrister was, he found that Miss Vrain, in her impatience, was before him ; for he arrived to see her dismiss her cab at the end of the street, and met her half way down.

His heart gave a bound as he saw her graceful figure, and he felt the hot blood rise to his cheeks as he advanced to meet her.

Diana, quite unconscious of having, like her namesake the moon, caused this spring-tide of the heart, could not forbear a glance of surprise ; but greeted her coadjutor without embarrassment and with all friendliness. Her thoughts were too taken up with her immediate task of exploring the scene of the crime to waste time in conjecturing the reason of the young man's blushes. Yet the instinct of her sex might have told her the truth, and probably it would have, but that it was blunted, or rather not exercised, by reason of her preoccupation.

"Have you the key, Mr. Denzil ?" said she eagerly.

"No ; but I have seen the landlord, and he has given us permission to go over the house. A charwoman who is cleaning up the place will let us in."

"A charwoman," repeated Miss Vrain, stopping short, "and cleaning up the house. Is it, then, about to receive a new tenant ?"

"Oh, no ; but the landlord wishes it to be aired and swept ; to keep it in some degree of order, I presume."

"What is the name of this woman ?"
"Mrs. Kebby."

"The same mentioned in the newspaper reports as having waited on my unhappy father ?"

"The same," replied Lucian with some hesitation ; "but I would advise you, Miss Vrain, not to question her too closely about your father."

"Why not? Ah, I see; you think her answers about his drinking habits will give me pain. No matter, I am prepared for all that. I don't blame him so much as those who drove him to intemperance. Is this the house?" she said, looking earnestly at the neglected building before which they were standing.

"Yes," replied Lucian, ringing the bell, "it was in this house that your father came to his untimely end. And here is Mrs. Kebby."

That amiable crone had opened the door while the young man was speaking, and now stood eyeing her visitors with a blear-eyed look of dark suspicion.

"What is't ye want?" she demanded with a raven-like croak.

"Mr. Peacock has given this lady and myself permission to go over the house," responded Lucian, trying to pass.

"And how do I know if he did?" grumbled Mrs. Kebby, blocking the way.

"Because I tell you so."

"And because I am the daughter of Mr. Vrain," said Diana, stepping forward.

"Lord love ye, miss, are ye?" croaked Mrs. Kebby, stepping aside. "And ye've come to look at your pa's blood, I'll be bound."

Diana turned pale and shuddered, but controlling herself by an effort of will she swept past the old woman and entered the sitting-room. "Is this the place?" she asked Lucian, who was holding the door open.

"That it is, miss," cried the charwoman, who had hobbled after them, "and yonder is the poor gentleman's blood; it soaked right through the carpet," added Mrs. Kebby with ghoulish relish; "Lor', how it must 'ave poured out."

"Hold your tongue, woman," said Lucian roughly, seeing that Diana looked as though about to faint; "get on with your work."

"I'm going; it's upstairs I'm sweepin'," growled the crone retreating.

"You'll bring me to you if ye give a holler. I'll show ye round for a shilling."

"You shall have double if you leave us alone," said Lucian, pointing to the door.

Mrs. Kebby's blear eyes lighted up, and she leered amiably at the couple.

"I dessay it's worth two shillings," she said, chuckling hoarsely. "Oh, I'm not so old but what I don't know two turtle doves. He, he! to kiss over yer father's blood. Lawks, what a match 'twill be. He, he!"

Still laughing hoarsely, Mrs. Kebby in the midst of her unholy joy was pushed out of the door by Lucian, who immediately afterwards turned to see if Diana had overheard her ill-chosen and ominous words. But Miss Vrain, with a hard, white face, was leaning against the wall, and gave no sign of such knowledge. Her eyes were fixed on a dull-looking red stain of a dark hue, irregular in shape, and her hands the while were pressed closely against her bosom as though she felt a cruel pain in her heart. With bloodless cheek and trembling lip the daughter looked upon the evidence of her father's death. Lucian was alarmed by her unnatural pallor.

"Miss Vrain," he exclaimed, starting forward, "you are ill; let me lead you out of this house."

"No," said Diana waving him back, "not till we examine every inch of it; don't speak to me, please. I wish to use my eyes rather than my tongue."

Denzil, both as a lover and a friend, respected this emotion of the poor young lady, so natural under the circumstances; and, in silence, conducted her from room to room. All were empty and still dusty, for Mrs. Kebby's broom swept sufficiently lightly, and the footfalls of the pair echoed hollowly in the vast spaces.

Diana looked into every corner, examined every fireplace, attempted every window, but in no place could she find any extraneous object likely to afford a clue to the crime. They went down into the basement, and ex-

plored the kitchen, the servant's parlour, the scullery and the pantry, but with the same unsatisfactory result. The kitchen door, which led out into the back yard, showed signs of having been lately opened; but when Diana drew Lucian's attention to this fact, as the murderer having possibly entered thereby, he assured her that it had only lately been opened by the detective Link when he was searching for clues.

"I saw this door," added Lucian, striking it with his cane, "a week before your father was killed. He showed it to me himself, to prove that no one could have entered the house during his absence; and I was satisfied then, from the rusty condition of the bolts and the absence of the key in the lock, that the door had not been opened—at all events during his tenancy."

"Then how could those who killed him have entered?"

"That is what I wish to learn, Miss Vrain. But why do you speak in the plural?"

"Because I believe that Lydia and Ferruci killed my father."

"But I have proved to you that Mrs. Vrain remained at Bath."

"I know it," replied Diana quickly, "but she sent Ferruci up to kill my father, and I speak in the plural because I think—in a moral sense—she is as guilty as the Italian."

"That may be, Miss Vrain; but as yet we have not proved their guilt."

Diana made no answer, but followed by Lucian ascended to the upper part of the house, where they found Mrs. Kebby sweeping so vigorously that she had raised a kind of dust storm. As soon as she saw the couple she hobbled towards them to cajole them, if possible, into giving her money.

For a few moments Diana looked at her haughtily, not relishing the familiarity of the old dame, but unexpectedly she stepped forward with a look of excitement.

"Where did you get that ribbon?" she asked Mrs. Kebby, pointing to a

scrap of personal adornment on the neck of the rusty old creature.

"This?" croaked Mrs. Kebby. "I picked it up in the kitchen downstairs. It's a pretty red and yaller thing, but of no value, miss, so I don't s'pose you'll take it off me."

Paying no attention to this whimpering, Diana twitched the ribbon out of the old woman's hands and examined it. It was a broad yellow ribbon of rich silk spotted with red—very noticeable and evidently of foreign manufacture.

"It is the same," cried Diana greatly excited. "Mr. Denzil, I bought this ribbon myself in Florence."

"Well," said Lucian, wondering at her excitement, "and what does that prove?"

"This: that a stiletto which my father bought in Florence at the same time has been used to kill him. I tied this ribbon myself round the handle of the stiletto."

CHAPTER XI

FURTHER DISCOVERIES

THE silence which followed Diana's announcement regarding the ribbon and stiletto—for Lucian kept silence out of sheer astonishment—was broken by the hoarse voice of Mrs. Kebby.

"If ye want the ribbon, Miss, I'll not say no to a shilling. With what your good gentleman promised that will be three as I'm ready to take," and Mrs. Kebby held out a dirty claw for the silver.

"You'll sell it, will you?" cried out Diana indignantly, pouncing down on

the harridan. "How dare you keep what isn't yours? If you had shown the detective this," shaking the ribbon in Mrs. Kebby's face, "he might have caught the criminal."

"Pardon me," interposed Lucian, finding his voice. "I hardly think so, Miss Vrain; for no one but yourself could have told that the ribbon adorned the stiletto. Where did you see the weapon last?"

"In the library at Berwin Manor. I hung it up on the wall myself, by this ribbon."

"Are you sure it is the same ribbon?"

"I am certain," replied Diana emphatically. "I cannot be mistaken; the colour and pattern are both peculiar. Where did you find it?" she added, turning to Mrs. Kebby.

"In the kitchen, I tell ye," growled the old woman sullenly. "I only found it this blessed morning. 'Twas in a dark corner near the door as leads down to the wood-shed. How was I to know 'twas any good?"

"Did you find anything else?" asked Lucian mildly.

"No, I didn't, sir!"

"Not a stiletto?" demanded Diana, putting the ribbon in her pocket.

"I don't know what's a stiletter, Miss. But I didn't find nothing; and I ain't a thief, though some people as sets themselves above others by taking ribbons as doesn't belong to 'em mayn't be much good."

"The ribbon is not yours!" said Diana haughtily.

"Yes it are! findings is keepings with me," answered Mrs. Kebby.

"Don't anger her," whispered Denzil, touching Miss Vrain's arm, "we may find her useful."

Diana looked from him to the old woman, and opened her purse, at the sight of which Mrs. Kebby's sour face relaxed. When Miss Vrain gave her half-a-sovereign, she quite beamed with joy. "The blessing of Heaven on you, my dear," she said with a curtsey. "Gold! good gold! ah, this is a brave day's work for me; thirteen blessed shillings."

"Ten, you mean, Mrs. Kebby!"

"Oh no, sir," cried Mrs. Kebby obsequiously, "the lady gave me ten, bless her heart; but you've quite forgot your three."

"I said two!"

"Ah, so you did, sir! I'm a poor schollard at 'rithmetic."

"You are clever enough to get money out of people," said Diana, who was disgusted at the avarice of the hag; "however, for the present you must be content with what I have given you. If, in cleaning this house, you find any other article, whatever it may be, you shall have another ten shillings on consideration that you take it at once to Mr. Denzil."

Mrs. Kebby, who was tying up the piece of gold in the corner of her handkerchief, nodded her old head with much complacency. "I'll do it, miss; that is if the gentleman will pay on delivery. I like cash."

"You shall have cash," said Lucian laughing; and then as Diana intimated her intention of leaving the house, he descended the stairs in her company.

Miss Vrain kept silence until they were outside in the sunshine, when she cast an upward glance at the warm blue sky—dappled with light clouds.

"I am glad to be out of that house," she said with a shudder, "there is something in its dark and freezing atmosphere which chills my spirits."

"It is said to be haunted you know!" said Lucian carelessly; then after a pause he spoke on the subject which was uppermost in his mind. "Now that you have this piece of evidence, Miss Vrain, what do you intend to do?"

"Make sure that I have made no mistake, Mr. Denzil. I shall go down to Berwin Manor this afternoon. If the stiletto is still hanging on the library wall by its ribbon I shall admit my mistake! if it is absent, why then I shall return to town and consult with you as to what is best to be done. You know I rely on you."

"I shall do whatever you wish, Miss Vrain!" said Lucian fervently.

"It is very good of you," replied the lady gratefully, "for I have no right to take up your time in this manner."

"You have every right—that is I mean—I mean," stammered Denzil, thinking from the surprised look of Miss Vrain that he had gone too far at so early a stage of their acquaintance. "I mean that as a briefless barrister I have ample time at my command, and I shall only be too happy to place it and myself at your service. And moreover," he added in a lighter tone, "I have some selfish interest in the matter also; for it is not every one who finds so difficult a riddle as this to solve. I shall never rest easy in my mind until I unravel the whole of this tangled skein."

"How good you are," cried Diana impulsively, extending her hand, "it is as impossible for me to thank you sufficiently now for your kindness as it will be to reward you hereafter should we succeed."

"As to my reward!" said Lucian, retaining her hand longer than was necessary, "we can decide what I merit when your father's death is avenged."

Diana coloured and turned away her eyes, withdrawing her hand in the meantime from the too warm clasp of the young man. A sense of his meaning was suddenly borne in upon her by look and clasp; and she felt a maidenly confusion at the momentary boldness of this undeclared lover. However, with feminine tact she laughed off the hint, and shortly afterwards took her leave, promising to communicate as speedily as possible with Lucian regarding the circumstances of her visit to Bath.

The barrister wished to escort her back to the Royal John Hotel in Kensington, but Miss Vrain, guessing his feelings, would not permit this; so Lucian, hat in hand, was left standing in Geneva Square, while his divinity drove off in a prosaic hansom. With her went the glory of the sunlight,

the sweetness of the spring; and Denzil, more in love than ever, sighed hugely as he walked slowly back to his lodgings.

For doleful moods, hard work and other interests are the sole cure: therefore that same afternoon Lucian returned to explore the Silent House on his own account. It had struck him as suggestive—that the parti-coloured ribbon to which Diana attached such importance should have been found in so out-of-the-way a corner as the threshold of the door which conducted to what Mrs. Kebby with characteristic misrepresentation called the wood shed. In reality the place in question was a cellar which extended under the soil of the back yard, and was lighted from the top by a skylight placed on a level with the ground.

On being admitted again by Mrs. Kebby, and sending that ancient female to her Augean task of cleansing the house, Lucian descended to the basement in order to examine kitchen and cellar more particularly. If, as Diana stated, the ribbon had been knotted loosely about the hilt of the stiletto, it must have fallen off unnoticed by the assassin, when, weapon in hand, he was retreating from the scene of crime.

"He must have come down here from the sitting-room!" mused Denzil as he stood in the cool damp kitchen. "And—as the ribbon was found by Mrs. Kebby near yonder door—it is most probable that he left the kitchen by that passage for the cellar. Now it remains for me to find out how he made his exit from the cellar; and also I must look for the stiletto, which he possibly dropped in his flight as he did the ribbon."

While thus soliloquising Denzil lighted a candle which he had taken the precaution to bring with him for the purpose of making his underground explorations. Having thus provided himself with means to dispel the darkness, he stepped into the door and descended the stone stairs which led to the cellars.

At the foot of the steps he found himself in a passage running from the front to the back of the house, and forthwith turned to the right in order to reach the particular cellar, which was dug out in the manner of a cave under the back yard.

This, as Lucian ascertained by walking round, was faced with stone and had bins on all four sides for the storage of wine. Overhead there was a glass skylight, of which the glass was so dusty and dirty that only a few rays of light could struggle into the murky depths below. But what particularly attracted the attention of Denzil was a short wooden ladder lying on the stone pavement, and which probably was used to reach the wine in the upper bins.

"And I should not be surprised if it had been used for another purpose," murmured Lucian, glancing upward at the square aperture of the skylight.

It struck him as possible that a stranger could enter thereby and descend by the ladder. To test the truth of this he reared the ladder in the middle of the cellar so that its top rung rested against the lower edge of the square overhead. Ascending carefully—for the ladder was by no means stout—he pushed the glass frame upward and found that it yielded easily to a moderate amount of strength. Climbing up step after step Lucian arose through the aperture like a genie out of the earth, and soon found that he could jump easily out of the cellar into the yard.

"Good," he exclaimed, much gratified by this discovery. "I now see how the assassin entered. No wonder the kitchen door was bolted and barred, and that no one was seen to visit Vrain by the front door. Any one who knew the position of that skylight could obtain admission easily at any hour by descending the ladder, and passing through cellar and kitchen to the upper part of the house. So much is clear; but I must next dis-

cover how those who entered got into this yard."

And indeed there seemed no outlet; for the yard was enclosed on three sides by a fence of palings the height of a man, and rendered impervious to damp by a coating of tar; on the fourth side by the house itself. Only over the fence—which was no insuperable obstacle—could a stranger have gained access to the yard; and towards the fence opposite to the house Lucian walked. In it there was no gate, or opening of any kind, so it would appear that to come into the yard a stranger would need to climb over; a feat easily achieved by a moderately active man.

As Denzil examined this frail barrier his eye was caught by a fluttering object on the left—that is, the side in a line with the skylight. This he found was the scrap of a woman's veil of thin black gauze spotted with velvet. At once his thoughts reverted to the shadow of the woman on the blind, and the suspicions of Diana Vrain.

"Great Heavens!" he thought, "can that doll of a Lydia be guilty after all?"

CHAPTER XII

THE VEIL AND ITS OWNER

As may be surmised, Lucian was considerably startled by the discovery of this important evidence so confirmative of Diana's suspicions. Yet the knowledge which Link had gained, relative to Mrs. Vrain's remaining at Berwin Manor to keep Christmas seemed to contradict the fact; and he

could by no means reconcile her absence with the presence on the fence of the fragment of gauze; still less with the supposition that she must have climbed over a tolerably difficult obstacle to enter the yard, let alone the necessity—by no means easy to a woman—of descending into the disused cellar by means of a shaky and fragile ladder.

"After all," thought Lucian when he was seated that same evening at his dinner, "I am no more certain that the veil is the property of Mrs. Vrain than I am that she was the woman whose shadow I saw on the blind. Whosoever it was that gained entrance by passing over fence and through cellar, must have come across the yard belonging to the house facing the other road. Therefore the person must be known to the owner of that house, and I must discover who the owner is. Miss Greeb will know!"

Lucian made this last remark with the greatest confidence, as he was satisfied from a long acquaintance with his landlady that there was very little concerning her own neighbourhood of which she was ignorant. The result verified his belief, for when Miss Greeb came in to clear the table—a duty she invariably undertook so as to have a chance of conversing with her admired lodger—she was able to afford him the fullest information on the subject. The position of the house in question; the name of its owner; the character of its tenants; she was thoroughly well posted up in every item, and willingly imparted her knowledge with much detail and comment.

"No. 9 Jersey Street," said she, unhesitatingly; "that is the number of the house at the back of the haunted mansion, Mr. Denzil. I know it as well as I know my ten fingers."

"To whom does it belong?" asked Lucian.

"Mr. Peacock; he owns most of the property round about here, having bought up the land when the

place was first built on. He's seventy years of age you know, Mr. Denzil," continued Miss Greeb conversationally, "and rich!—Lord, I don't know how rich he is. Building houses cheap and letting them dear; he has made more out of that than in sanding his sugar and chicorying his coffee. He—"

"What is the name of the tenant?" interrupted Lucian, cutting short this rapid sketch of Peacock's life.

"Mrs. Bensusan, one of the largest women hereabouts."

"I don't quite understand."

"Fat, Mr. Denzil; she turns the scale at eighteen stone, and has pretty well broke every weighing machine in the place."

"What reputation has she, Miss Greeb?"

"Oh, pretty good!" said the little woman shrugging her shoulders, "though they do say she overcharges and underfeeds her lodgers."

"She keeps a boarding-house, then?"

"Well, she lets rooms," explained Miss Greeb in a very definite manner; "and those who live in them supply their own food, and pay for service and kitchen fire."

"Who is with her now?"

"No one," replied the landlady promptly. "She's had her bill up these three months. Her last lodger left about Christmas."

"What is his name—or her name?"

"Oh, it was a 'he,'" said Miss Greeb smiling. "Mrs. Bensusan prefers gentlemen who are out of doors all day, to ladies muddling and meddling all day about the house. I must say I do too, Mr. Denzil," ended the lady with a fascinating glance.

"What is his name, Miss Greeb?" repeated Lucian, quite impervious to the hint.

"Let me see," said Miss Greeb, discomfited at the result of her failure. "A queer name that had to do with payments. Bill as the short for William. No, it wasn't that, although it does suggest an account. Quarter-day, no! but it had something to do

with quarter-days. Rent," finished Miss Greeb triumphantly. "Rent with a 'W' before it."

"W-r-e-n-t!" spelt Lucian.

"Yes! Wrent! Mr. Wrent; a strange name, Mr. Denzil; a kind of a charade as I may say. He was with Mrs. Bensusan six months; came to her house about the time Mr. Berwin hired No. 13."

"Very strange!" assented Lucian to stop further comment, "what kind of a man was this Mr. Wrent?"

"I don't know. I never heard much about him," replied Miss Greeb regretfully. "May I ask why you want to know all this, Mr. Denzil?"

Lucian hesitated, as he rather dreaded the chattering tongue of his landlady, and did not wish his connection with the Vrain case to become public property in Geneva Square. Still Miss Greeb was a valuable ally, if only for her wide acquaintance with the neighbourhood, its inhabitants and their doings. Therefore, after a moment's reflection, he resolved to secure Miss Greeb as a coadjutor, and risk her excessive garrulity.

"Can you keep a secret, Miss Greeb?" he asked with impressive solemnity.

Struck by his serious air, and at once on fire with curiosity to learn its reason, Miss Greeb loudly protested that she should sooner die than breathe a word of what her lodger was about to divulge. She hinted with many a mysterious look and nod that secrets endangering the domestic happiness of every family in the square were known to her; and appealed to the fact that such families still lived in harmony as a proof she was to be trusted.

"Wild horses wouldn't drag out of me what I know!" cried Miss Greeb earnestly. "You can confide in me as you would in a"—she was about to say mother, but recollecting her juvenile looks substituted the word "sister."

"Very good!" said Lucian, explain-

ing just as much as would serve his purpose. "Then I may tell you, Miss Greeb, that I suspect the assassin of Mr. Vrain entered through Mrs. Bensusan's house, and so got into the yard of No. 13."

"Lord!" cried Miss Greeb taken by surprise. "You don't say, sir, that Mr. Wrent is a murdering villain steeped in gore."

"No! no!" replied Lucian smiling at this highly coloured description, "do not jump to conclusions, Miss Greeb; so far as I am aware this Mr. Wrent you speak of is innocent. Do you know Mrs. Bensusan and her house well?"

"I've visited both several times, Mr. Denzil."

"Well, then, tell me," continued the barrister, "is the house built with a full frontage like those in this square?—I mean to gain Mrs. Bensusan's back yard, is it necessary to go through Mrs. Bensusan's house?"

"No!" replied Miss Greeb shutting her eyes to conjure up the image of her friend's premises. "You can go round the back through the side passage which leads in from Jersey Road."

"H'm!" said Lucian in a dissatisfied tone. "That complicates matters!"

"How so, sir?" demanded the curious landlady.

"Never mind just now, Miss Greeb. Do you think you could draw me a plan of this passage of Mrs. Bensusan's house, and of No. 13 with the yards between?"

"I never could sketch," said Miss Greeb regretfully, "and I am no artist, Mr. Denzil; but I think I can do what you want."

"Here is a sheet of paper and a pencil. Will you sketch me the houses as clearly as you can?"

With much reflection and nibbling of the pencil, and casting of her eyes up to the ceiling to aid her memory, Miss Greeb in ten minutes produced the required sketch.

"There you are, Mr. Denzil," said Miss Greeb placing this work of art

before the barrister, " that's as good as I can draw."

"It is excellent, Miss Greeb," replied Lucian, examining the plan. "I see that anyone can get into Mrs. Bensusan's yard through the side passage."

"Oh, yes! but I don't think a person could without being seen by Mrs. Bensusan or Rhoda."

"Who is Rhoda?"

"The servant; she's as sharp as a needle, but an idle slut for all that, Mr. Denzil. They say she's a gipsy of some kind."

"Is the gate of this passage locked at night?"

"Not that I know of!"

"Then what is to prevent any one coming in under cover of darkness and climbing the fence? He would escape then being seen by the landlady and her servant."

"I daresay; but he'd beseen climbing over the fence from the back windows of the houses on each side of No. 13."

"Not if he chose a dark night for the climbing."

"Well, even if he did, how could he get into No. 13?" argued Miss Greeb. "You know I've read the report of the case, Mr. Denzil, and it couldn't be found out (as the kitchen door was locked, and no stranger entered the square) how the murdering assassin got in."

"I may discover even that," replied Lucian, not choosing to tell Miss Greeb that he had already discovered the entrance. "With time and inquiry and observation we can do much. Thank you, Miss Greeb," he continued, slipping the drawing of the plan into his breast coat pocket. "I am much obliged for your information. Of course you'll repeat our conversation to no one?"

"I swear to breathe no word," said Miss Greeb dramatically; and left the room greatly pleased with this secret understanding, which had quite the air of an innocent intrigue such as was detailed in journals designed for the use of the family circle.

For the next day or two Lucian mused over the information he had obtained, and made a fresh drawing of the plan for his own satisfaction; but he took no steps on this new evidence, as he was anxious to submit his discoveries to Miss Vrain before doing so. At the present time Diana was at Bath taking possession of her ancestral acres, and consulting the family lawyer on various matters connected with the property.

Once she wrote to Lucian, advising him that she had heard several pieces of news likely to be useful in clearing up the mystery; but these she refused to communicate save at a personal interview. Denzil was thus kept in suspense, and unable to rest until he knew precisely the value of Miss Vrain's newly acquired information; therefore it was with a feeling of relief that he received a note from her asking him to call at three o'clock on Sunday at the Royal John Hotel.

Since her going and coming a week had elapsed.

Now that his divinity had returned and he was about to see her again, the sun shone once more in the heavens for Lucian, and he arrayed himself for his visit with the utmost care. His heart beat, and his colour rose, as he was ushered into the little sitting-room; and he thought less of the case at the moment than of the joy in seeing Miss Vrain once more, in hearing her speak and watching her lovely face.

On her part, Diana, recollecting their last meeting, or more particularly their parting, blushed in her turn, and gave her hand to the barrister with a new-born timidity. She also was inclined to like Lucian more than was reasonable for the peace of her heart; so these two people, each drawn to the other, should have come together as lovers even at this second meeting.

But, alas for the prosaicness of this work-a-day world, they had to assume the attitudes of lawyer and client; and discourse of crime instead of love.

The situation was a trifle ironical ; and must have provoked the laughter of the gods.

" Well ? " asked Miss Vrain, getting to business as soon as Lucian was seated, " and what have you found out ? "

" A great deal likely to be of service to us—and you ? "

" I ! " replied Miss Vrain in a satisfied tone. " I have discovered that the stiletto with the ribbon is gone from the library."

" Who took it away ? "

" No one knows ! I can't find out, although I asked all the servants, but it has been missing from its place for some months."

" Do you think Mrs. Vrain took it ? "

" I can't say, " replied Diana, " but I have made one discovery about Mrs. Vrain which implicates her still more in the crime. She was not in Berwin Manor on Christmas Eve ; but in town."

" Really ! " said Lucian much amazed. " But Link was told that she spent Christmas in the Manor at Bath."

" So she did. Link asked generally and was answered generally. Mrs. Vrain went up to town on Christmas Eve and returned on Christmas Day ; but, " said Diana with emphasis, " she spent the night in town, and on that night the murder was committed."

Lucian produced his pocket-book and took therefrom the fragment of gauze which he handed to Diana.

" I found this on the fence at the back of No. 13, " he said, " it is a veil—a portion of a velvet-spotted veil."

" A velvet-spotted veil ! " cried Diana looking at it. " Then it belongs to Lydia Vrain. She usually wears velvet-spotted veils. Mr. Denzil, the evidence is complete ; that woman is guilty."

CHAPTER XIII

GOSSIP

GOING by circumstantial evidence Diana certainly had good grounds to accuse Mr's. Vrain of committing the crime ; for there were four points at least which could be proved past all doubt as incriminating her strongly in the matter.

In the first place, the female shadow on the blind seen by Lucian, showed that a woman had been in the habit of entering the house by the secret way of the cellar, and during the absence of Vrain.

Secondly, the finding of the parti-coloured ribbon in the Silent House, which had been knotted round the handle of the stiletto by Diana, and the absence of the stiletto itself from its usual place on the wall of the Berwin Manor library, proved that the weapon had been removed therefrom to London, and, presumably, used to commit the deed, seeing that otherwise there was no necessity for its presence in the Geneva Square mansion.

Thirdly, Diana had discovered that Lydia had spent the night of the murder in town ; and, lastly, she also declared that the fragment of gauze found by Lucian on the dividing fence was the property of Mrs. Vrain.

This quartette of charges was recapitulated by Diana in support of her accusation of her step-mother.

" I always suspected Lydia as indirectly guilty, " she declared in conclusion of her speech for the prosecution, " but I was not certain until now that she had actually struck the blow herself."

" But did she ? " said Denzil, by no means convinced.

" I do not know what further evidence you require to prove it, "

retorted Diana indignantly. "She was in town on Christmas Eve; she took the stiletto from the library, and——"

"You can't prove that," interrupted Lucian decidedly, then seeing the look of anger on Diana's face he hastened to apologise. "Excuse me, Miss Vrain," he said nervously. "I am not the less your friend because I combat your arguments; but in this case it is necessary to look on both sides of the question. Is it possible to prove that Mrs. Vrain removed this dagger?"

"Nobody actually saw it in her possession," replied Diana, who was more amenable to reason than the majority of her sex, "but I can prove that the stiletto with its ribbon remained in the library after the departure of my father. If Lydia did not take it, who else had occasion to bring it up to London?"

"Let us say Count Ferruci," suggested Denzil.

Diana pointed to the fragment of the veil lying on the table. "On the evidence of that piece of gauze," she said, "it was Lydia who entered the house. Again, you saw her shadow on the window blind."

"I saw two shadows," corrected Lucian hastily, "those of a man and a woman."

"In plain English, Mr. Denzil, those of Mrs. Vrain and Count Ferruci."

"We cannot be certain of that."

"But circumstantial evidence——"

"Is not always conclusive, Miss Vrain."

"Upon my word, sir, you seem inclined to defend this woman."

"Miss Vrain!" said Lucian seriously, "if we don't give her the benefit of every doubt the jury will, should she be tried on this charge. I admit that the evidence against this woman is strong, but it is not certain; and I argue the case looking at it from her point of view—the only view which is likely to be taken by her counsel. If Mrs. Vrain killed her husband she must have had a strong motive to do so."

"Well!" said Diana impatiently, "there is the assurance money!"

"I don't know if that motive is quite strong enough to justify this woman in risking her neck," responded the barrister. "As Mrs. Vrain of Berwin Manor she had an ample income, for your father seems to have left all the rents to her, and spent but little on himself; also she had an assured position, and, on the whole, a happy life. Why should she risk losing these advantages to gain more money?"

"She wanted to marry Ferruci," said Diana, driven to another point of defence. "She was almost engaged to him before she married my foolish father; she invited him to Berwin Manor against the wish of her husband, and showed plainly that she loved him sufficiently to commit a crime for his sake. With my father dead and she in possession of £20,000, she could hope to marry this Italian."

"Can you prove that she was so reckless?"

"Yes, I can," replied Miss Vrain defiantly; "the same person who told me that Lydia was not at Berwin Manor on Christmas Eve can tell you that her behaviour with Count Ferruci was the talk of Bath."

"Who is this person?" asked Lucian looking up.

"A friend of mine—Miss Tyler. I brought her up with me, so that you should get her information at first hand. You can see her at once," and Diana rose to ring the bell.

"One moment," interposed Lucian before she could touch the button. "Tell me if Miss Tyler knows your reason for bringing her up."

"I have not told her directly," said Diana with some bluntness, "but as she is no fool I fancy she suspects. Why do you ask?"

"Because I have something to tell you which I do not wish your friend to hear, unless," added Lucian significantly, "you desire to take her into our confidence."

"No!" said Diana promptly. I

do not think it is wise to take her into our confidence. She is rather—well, to put it plainly, Mr. Denzil—rather a gossip."

"H'm ! as such, do you consider her evidence reliable ?"

"We can pick the grains of wheat out of the chaff. No doubt she exaggerates and garbles after the fashion of a scandal-loving woman, but her evidence is valuable especially as showing that Lydia was not at Bath on Christmas Eve. We will tell her nothing, so she can suspect as much as she likes ; if we do speak freely she will spread the gossip, and if we don't she will invent worse facts, so in either case it doesn't matter. What is it you have to tell me ?"

Lucian could scarcely forbear smiling at Diana's candidly expressed estimate of her ally's character, but, fearful of giving offence to his companion, he speedily composed his features. With much explanation and an exhibition of Miss Greeb's plan, he gave an account of his discoveries, beginning with his visit to the cellar and ending with the important conversation with his landlady. Diana listened attentively, and when he concluded gave it as her opinion that Lydia had entered the first yard by the side passage, and had climbed over the fence into the second, "as is clearly proved by the veil," she concluded decisively.

"But why should she take all that trouble and run the risk of being seen when it is plain that your father expected her ?"

"Expected her ?" cried Diana thunderstruck. "Impossible!"

"I don't know so much about that," replied Lucian drily, "although I admit that on the face of it my assertion appears improbable. But when I met your father the second time, he was so anxious to prove, by letting me examine the house, that no one had entered it during his absence, that I am certain he was well aware the shadows I saw were those of people he knew were in the room. Now if

the woman was Mrs. Vrain she must have been in the habit of visiting your father by the back way."

"And Ferruci also ?"

"I am not sure if the male shadow was Ferruci, no more than I am certain the other was Mrs. Vrain."

"But the veil ?"

Lucian shrugged his shoulders in despair. "That seems to prove it was she," he said dubiously, "but I can't explain your father's conduct in receiving her in so secretive a way. The whole thing is beyond me."

"Well ! what is to be done ?" said Diana after a pause, during which they looked blankly at one another.

"I must think. My head is too confused just now with this conflicting evidence to plan any line of action. As a relief let us examine your friend and hear what she has to say."

Diana assented and touched the bell. Shortly Miss Tyler appeared, ushered in by a nervous waiter to whom it would seem she had addressed a sharp admonition on his want of deference. Immediately on entering she pounced down on Miss Vrain like a hawk on a dove, pecked her on both cheeks, addressed her as "my dearest Di," and finally permitted herself with downcast eyes and a modest demeanor to be introduced to Lucian.

It might be inferred from the foregoing description that Miss Tyler was a young and ardent damsel in her teens ; whereas she was considerably nearer forty than thirty, and possessed an uncomely aspect unpleasing to male eyes. Her own were of a cold grey, her lips were thin, her waist pinched in, and—as the natural consequence of tight lacing—her nose was red. Her scanty hair was drawn off her high forehead very tightly, and screwed into a cast-iron knob at the nape of her long neck ; and she smiled occasionally in an acid manner with many teeth. She wore a plainly-made green dress with a toby frill ; and a large silver cross dangled on her flat bosom. Altogether, she was about as venomous a specimen of an unappro-

priated blessing as can well be imagined.

"Bella," said Miss Vrain to this unattractive female, "for certain reasons which I may tell you hereafter, Mr. Denzil wishes to know if Mrs. Vrain was at Berwin Manor on Christmas Eve."

"Of course she was not, dearest Di," said Bella drooping her elderly head on one scraggy shoulder with an acid smile. "Didn't I tell you so? I was asked by Lydia—alas, I wish I could say, my dearest Lydia—to spend Christmas at Berwin Manor. She invited me for my singing and playing, you know; and as we all have to make ourselves agreeable, I came to see her. On the day before Christmas she received a letter by the early post which seemed to upset her a great deal; and told me she would have to run up to town on business. She did, and stayed all night, and came down next morning to keep Christmas. I thought it very strange."

"What was her business in town, Miss Tyler?" asked Lucian.

"Oh, she didn't tell *me*," said Bella tossing her head. "At least, not directly, but I gathered from what she said that something was wrong with poor dear Mr. Clyne—her father, you know, dearest Di."

"Was the letter from him?"

"Oh, I couldn't say that, Mr. Denzil, as I don't know, and I never speak by hearsay. So much mischief is done in the world by people repeating idle tales of which they are not sure."

"Was Count Ferruci at Berwin Manor at that time?"

"Oh, dear me, no, Di. I told you that he was up in London the whole of Christmas week. I only hope," added Miss Tyler with a venomous smile, "that Lydia did not go up to meet him."

"Why should she?" demanded Lucian bluntly.

"Oh, I'm not blind!" cried Bella, shrilly laughing. "No, indeed. The Count—a most amiable man—was very attentive to me at one time; and

Lydia—a married woman—I regret to say, did not like him being so. I am indeed sorry to repeat scandal, Mr. Denzil, but the way in which Mrs. Vrain behaved towards me and carried on with the Count was not creditable. I am a gentlewoman, Mr. Denzil, and a Churchwoman, and as such cannot countenance such conduct as his."

"You infer, then, that Mrs. Vrain was in love with the Italian?"

"I shouldn't be at all surprised to hear it," cried Bella again. "But he did not care for her! Oh, dear, no! It is my belief, Mr. Denzil, that Mrs. Vrain knows more about the death of her husband than she chooses to admit. Oh, I've read *all* the papers; I know *all* about the death."

"Miss Tyler!" said Lucian alarmed.

"Bella!" cried Miss Vrain. "I—"

"Oh, I'm not blind, dearest," interrupted Bella speaking very fast. "I know you ask me these questions to find out if Lydia killed her husband. Well, she did!"

"How do you know, Miss Tyler?"

"Because I'm sure of it, Mr. Denzil. Wasn't Mr. Vrain stabbed with a dagger? Very well, then. There was a dagger hanging in the library of the Manor, and I saw it there four days before Christmas. When I looked for it on Christmas Day it was gone."

"Gone! Who took it?"

"Mrs. Vrain!"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I am," snapped Miss Tyler. "I didn't see her take it, but it was there before she went; and it wasn't there on Christmas Day. If Lydia did not take it who did?"

"Count Ferruci perhaps."

"He wasn't there. No!" cried Bella raising her head. "I'm sure Mrs. Vrain stole it and killed her husband, and I don't care who hears me say so."

Diana and Lucian looked at one another in silence.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HOUSE IN JERSEY STREET

As her listeners made no comment on Miss Tyler's accusation of Mrs. Vrain, she paused only for a moment to recover her breath and was off again in full cry with a budget of ancient gossip drawn forth from a very retentive memory.

"Of the way in which Lydia treated her poor dear husband I know little," cried the fair Bella. "Only this, that she drove him out of the house by her scandalous conduct. Yes, indeed; although you may not believe me, Di. You were away in Australia at the time; but I kept a watch on Lydia in your interest, dear, and our housemaid heard from your housemaid the most dreadful things. Why, Mr. Vrain remonstrated with Lydia and ordered Count Ferruci out of the house. But Lydia would not let him go; and Mr. Vrain left the house himself."

"Where did he go to, Miss Tyler?"

"I don't know; nobody knows. But it is my opinion," said the spinster with a significant look, "that he went to London to see about a divorce. But he was weak in the head, poor man, and I suppose let things go on. When next I heard of him he was a corpse in Geneva Square."

"But did my father tell his wife that he was in Geneva Square?"

"Dearest Di, I can't say; but I don't believe he had anything to do with her after he left the house."

"Then if she did not know his whereabouts how could she kill him?" asked Denzil pertinently.

Brought to a point which she could not evade, Bella declined to answer this question, but tossed her head and bit her lip with a fine colour. All her

accusations of Mrs. Vrain had been made generally, and, as Lucian noted, were unsupported by fact. From a legal point of view this spiteful gossip of a jealous woman was worth nothing, but in a broad sense it was certainly useful in showing the discord which had existed between Vrain and his wife. Lucian saw that little good was to be gained from this prejudiced witness; so thanking Miss Tyler courteously for her information he arose to go.

"Wait for a moment, Mr. Denzil," said Diana, hurriedly. "I want to ask you something. Bella, would you mind —"

"Leaving the room; oh, dear no," burst out Miss Tyler, annoyed at being excluded, "I've said all I have to say, and anything I can do, dearest Di, to assist you and Mr. Denzil in hanging that woman I —"

"Miss Tyler!" interrupted Lucian sternly. "You must not speak so wildly, for as yet there is nothing to prove that Mrs. Vrain is guilty."

"She is guilty enough for me, Mr. Denzil; but like all men I suppose you take her side, because she is supposed to be pretty. Pretty!" reflected Bella scornfully, "I never could see it myself; a painted up minx, dragged up in the gutter. I wonder at your taste, Mr. Denzil, indeed I do. Pretty, the idea! What fools men are! I'm glad I never married one. Indeed no! He! he!"

And with a shrill laugh to point this sour-grape sentiment and mark her disdain for Lucian, the fair Bella took herself and her lean form out of the room.

Diana and the barrister were too deeply interested in their business to take much notice of Bella's hysterical outburst; but looked at one another gravely as she departed.

"Well, Mr. Denzil," said the former repeating her earlier question, "what is to be done now? Shall we see Mrs. Vrain?"

"Not yet!" replied Lucian quickly. "We must secure proofs of Mrs.

Vrain's being in that yard before we can get any confession out of her. If you will leave it in my hands, Miss Vrain, I shall call on Mrs. Bensusan."

"Who is Mrs. Bensusan?"

"She is the tenant of the house in Jersey Street. It is possible that she or her servant may know something about the illegal use made of the right of way."

"Yes! I think that is the next step to take. But what am I to do in the meantime?"

"Nothing! If I were you I would not even see Mrs. Vrain!"

"I will not seek her voluntarily," replied Diana, "but as I have been to Berwin Manor she is certain to hear that I am in England, and may perhaps find out my address, and call. But if she does, you may be sure that I will be most judicious in my remarks."

"I leave all that to your discretion!" said Denzil rising. "Good-bye, Miss Vrain—as soon as I am in possession of any new evidence I shall call again."

"Good-bye, Mr. Denzil, and thank you for all your kindness."

Diana made this remark with so kindly a look, so becoming a blush, and so warm a pressure of the hand, that Lucian felt quite overcome; and, not trusting himself to speak, walked swiftly out of the room.

In spite of the gravity of the task in which he was concerned, at that moment he thought more of Diana's looks and speech than of the detective business which he had taken up for love's sake. But on reaching his rooms in Geneva Square he made a mighty effort to waken from these day dreams; and with a stern determination addressed himself resolutely to the work in hand.

In this case the bitter came before the sweet! But by accomplishing the desire of Diana, and solving the mystery of her father's death, Lucian hoped to win, not only her smiles, but the more substantial reward of her heart and hand.

Before calling on Mrs. Bensusan,

the barrister debated within himself as to whether it would not be judicious to call in again the assistance of Link; and, by telling him of the new evidence which had been found, place him thereby in possession of new material to prosecute the case. But Link lately had taken so pessimistic a view of the matter that Lucian fancied he would scoff at his late discoveries, and discourage him in prosecuting what seemed to be a fruitless quest.

Denzil was anxious, as Diana's knight, to do as much of the work as possible in order to gain the reward of her smiles. It is true that he had no legal authority to make these inquiries; and it was possible that Mrs. Bensusan might refuse to answer questions concerning her own business, unsanctioned by law; but on recalling the description of Miss Greeb, Lucian fancied that Mrs. Bensusan, as a fat woman, might only be good-natured and timid.

He therefore dismissed all ideas of asking Link to intervene; and resolved to risk a personal interview with the tenant of the Jersey Street house. It would be time enough to invite Link's assistance, he thought, when Mrs. Bensusan—as yet an unknown quantity in the case—proved obstinate in replying to his questions.

Mrs. Bensusan proved to be quite as stout as Miss Greeb had reported. A gigantically fat woman, she made up in breadth what she lacked in length. Yet she seemed to have some activity about her too; for she opened the door personally to Lucian, who was quite amazed when he beheld her monstrous bulk blocking up the doorway. Her face was white and round like a pale moon; she had staring eyes of a china-blue, resembling the vacant optics of a wax doll; and on the whole appeared to be a timid lymphatic woman, likely to answer any questions put to her in a sufficiently peremptory tone. Lucian foresaw that he was not likely to have much trouble with this mountain of flesh.

"What might you be pleased to want,

sir ?" she asked Lucian in the meekest of voices, " is it about the lodgings ? "

" Yes ! " answered the barrister boldly, for he guessed that Mrs. Bensusan would scuttle back into the house like a rabbit to its burrow, did he speak too plainly at the outset, " that is—I wish to inquire about a friend of mine."

" Did he lodge here, sir ? "

" Yes ! A Mr. Wrent ! "

" Deary me ! " said the fat woman with mild surprise. " Mr. Wrent left me shortly after Christmas. A kind gentleman but timid : he —— "

" Excuse me ! " interrupted Lucian, who wanted to get into the house, " but don't you think you could tell me about my friend in a more convenient situation ? "

" Oh, yes, sir, certainly, sir, " wheezed Mrs. Bensusan, rolling back up the narrow passage. " I beg your pardon, sir, for my forgetfulness, but my head ain't what it ought to be. I'm a lone widow, sir, and not over strong."

Denzil could have laughed at this description, as the lady's bulk gave the lie to her assertion. However, on diplomatic grounds he suppressed his mirth, and followed his ponderous guide into a sitting-room so small that she almost filled it herself.

As he left the passage he saw a brilliant red head pop down the staircase leading to the basement ; but whether it was that of a man or a woman he could not say. Still, on recalling Miss Greeb's description of the Bensusan household, he concluded that the red head was the property of Rhoda, the sharp servant, and argued from her appearance in the background and rapid disappearance that she was in the habit of listening to conversations she was not meant to hear.

Mrs. Bensusan sat down on the sofa as being most accommodating to her bulk ; and cast a watery look round the small apartment which was furnished in that extraordinary fashion which seems to be the peculiar characteristic of boarding houses. The walls and carpet were patterned

with glowing bunches of red roses ; the furniture was covered with stamped red velvet ; the ornaments consisted of shells, wax fruit under glass shades, mats of Berlin wool, vases with dangling pendants of glass and such like elegant survivals of the early Victorian epoch.

Hideous as the apartment was it seemed to afford Mrs. Bensusan—also a survival—great pleasure ; and she cast a complacent look around as Lucian seated himself on an uncomfortable chair covered with an antimacassar of crochet work.

" My rooms are most comfortable an' much liked, " said Mrs. Bensusan sighing, " but I have not had many lodgers lately. Rhoder thinks it must be on account of that horrible murder.

" The murder of Vrain in No. 13 ? "

" Ah ! " groaned the fat woman looking tearfully over her double chin, " I see you have heard of it."

" Everybody has heard of it, " replied Lucian, " and I was one of the first to hear, since I live in Miss Greeb's house opposite No. 13."

" Indeed, sir ! " grunted Mrs. Bensusan stiffening a little at the sound of a rival lodging-house keeper's name. " Then you are Mr. Denzil, the gentleman who occupies Miss Greeb's first floor front."

" Yes. And I have come to ask you a few questions."

" About what, sir ? " said Mrs. Bensusan, visibly alarmed.

" Concerning Mr. Wrent ! "

" You are a friend of his ? "

" I said so, Mrs. Bensusan, but as a matter of fact I never set eyes on the gentleman in my life."

Mrs. Bensusan gasped like a fish out of water, and patted her fat breast with her fat hand as though to give herself courage. " It is not like a gentleman to say that another gentleman's his friend when he ain't, " she said with an attempt at dignity.

" Very true, " answered Lucian with great composure, " but you know the saying, ' All is fair in love and war.' I will be plain with you, Mrs. Ben-

susan," he added. "I am here to seek possible evidence in connection with the murder of Mr. Vrain, in No. 13, on Christmas Eve."

Mrs. Bensusan gave a kind of hoarse screech, and stared at Lucian in a horrified manner.

"Murder!" she repeated. "Lord! what mur—that murder. Mr. Vrain! Mr. Vrain—that murder!" she repeated over and over again.

"Yes! the murder of Mr. Vrain in No. 13 Geneva Square on Christmas Eve. Now do you understand?"

With another gasp Mrs. Bensusan threw up her fat hands and raised her eyes to the ceiling.

"As I am a Christian woman, sir," she cried, "I am as innocent as a babe unborn."

"Of what?" asked Lucian sharply.

"Of the murder!" wept Mrs. Bensusan, now dissolved in tears. "Rhoda said—"

"I don't want to hear what Rhoda said," interrupted Lucian impatiently, "and I am not accusing you of the murder. But—your house is at the back of No. 13."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Bensusan, weeping like a Niobe.

"And a fence divides your yard from that of No. 13?"

"I won't contradict you, sir, it do!"

"And there is a passage leading from Jersey Street into your yard?"

"There is, Mr. Denzil; it's useful for the tradespeople."

"And I daresay useful to others," said Lucian drily. "Now, Mrs. Bensusan, do you know if any lady was in the habit of passing through that passage at night?"

Before Mrs. Bensusan could answer the door was dashed open, and Rhoda the red-headed darted into the room.

"Don't answer, missus," she cried shortly; "as you love me, mum, don't."

CHAPTER XV

RHODA AND THE CLOAK

THE one servant of Mrs. Bensusan was a girl of seventeen, who had a local fame in the neighbourhood on account of her sharp tongue and many precocious qualities. No one knew who her parents were, or where the fat landlady had picked her up; but she had been in the Jersey Street house some ten years and had been educated and—in a manner—adopted by its mistress, although Mrs. Bensusan always gave her cronies to understand that Rhoda was simply and solely the domestic of the establishment.

Nevertheless, for one of her humble position, she had a wonderful power over her stout employer; the power of a strong mind over a weak one, and in spite of her youth it was well known that Rhoda managed the domestic economy of the house. Mrs. Bensusan was the sovereign, Rhoda the prime minister.

This position she had earned by dint of her own sharpness in dealing with the world. And the local tradesmen were afraid of Rhoda. "Mrs. Bensusan's devil" they called her, and never dared to give short weight or charge extra prices or pass off damaged goods as new, when Rhoda was the purchaser. On the contrary, No. 9, Jersey Street was supplied with everything of the best promptly and civilly at ordinary market rates; for neither butcher, nor baker, nor candlestick maker was daring enough to risk Rhoda's tongue raging like a prairie fire over their shortcomings. Several landladies, knowing Rhoda's value, had tried to entice her from Mrs. Bensusan by offers of higher wages and better quarters; but the girl refused to leave her stout mistress.

and so continued quite a fixture of the lodgings. Even in the City Rhoda had been spoken of by clerks who had lived in Jersey Street, and so had more than a local reputation for originality.

This celebrated handmaid was as lean as her mistress was stout. Her hair was magnificent in quality and quantity, but, alas! was of the unpopular tint called red, not auburn, or copper hued, or the famous Titian colour, but a blazing fiery red, which made it look like a comic wig. Her face was pale and freckled, her eyes black—in strange contrast to her hair—and her mouth large, but garnished with an excellent set of white teeth.

Rhoda was not neat in her attire, perhaps not having arrived at the age of coquetry—for she wore a dingy grey dress much too short for her, a pair of carpet slippers which had been left by a departed lodger; and usually went about with her sleeves tucked up, and a resolute look on her sharp face. Such was the appearance of Mrs. Bensusan's devil, who entered to forbid her mistress confiding in Lucian.

"Oh, Rhoda!" groaned Mrs. Bensusan. "You bad gal; I believe as you've 'ad your ear to the keyhole."

"I 'ave!" retorted Rhoda defiantly, "it's been there for five minutes, and good it is for you, mum, as I ain't above listening. What do you mean, sir," she cried turning on Lucian like a fierce sparrow, "by coming 'ere to frighten two lone females; and her as innocent as a spring chicken."

"Oh!" said Lucian looking at her composedly, "so you are the celebrated Rhoda. I've heard of you."

"Not much good then, sir, if Miss Greeb was talking," rejoined the red-haired girl with a sniff. "Oh, I know her."

"Rhoda! Rhoda!" bleated her mistress, "do 'old your tongue. I tell you this gentleman's a police."

"He ain't!" said the undaunted Rhoda. "He's in the law. Oh, I know him."

"Ain't the law the police, you foolish gal?"

"Of course it—" began Rhoda, when Lucian, who thought that she had displayed quite sufficient eccentricity, cut her short with a quick gesture.

"See here, my girl," he said sharply.

"You must not behave in this fashion. I have reason to believe that the assassin of Mr. Vrain entered the house through the premises of your mistress."

"Lawks, what a 'orrible idear," shrieked Mrs. Bensusan, "good 'eavens, Rhoda, did you see the murdering villain?"

"Me? no! I never sawr nothing, mum," replied Rhoda doggedly.

Lucian, watching the girl's face and the uneasy expression in her eyes, felt convinced she was not telling the truth. It was no use forcing her to speak, as he saw very plainly that Rhoda was one of those obstinate people whom severity only hardened. Much more could be done with her by kindness; and Denzil adopted this—to him—more congenial course.

"If Rhoda is bound by any promise, Mrs. Bensusan, I do not wish her to speak," he said indifferently, "but in the interests of justice I am sure you will not refuse to answer my questions."

"Lord, sir! I know nothing!" whimpered the terrified landlady.

"Will you answer a few questions?" asked Denzil persuasively.

Mrs. Bensusan glanced in a scared manner at Rhoda who, meanwhile, had been standing in a sullen and hesitating attitude. When she thought herself unobserved she stole swift glances at the visitor, trying evidently to read his character by observation of his face and manner. It would seem that her scrutiny was favourable, for before Mrs. Bensusan could answer Lucian's question, she asked him one herself.

"What d'ye want to know, sir?"

"I want to know all about Mr. Wrent."

"Why?"

"Because I fancy he has something to do with this crime."

"Lord!" groaned Mrs. Bensusan, "ave I waited on a murderer?"

"I don't say he is a murderer, Mrs. Bensusan, but he knows something likely to put us on the track of the criminal."

"What makes ye take up the case?" demanded Rhoda sharply.

"Because I know that Mr. Wrent came to board in this house shortly after Mr. Vrain occupied No. 13," replied Denzil.

"Who says he did?"

"Miss Greeb, my landlady; and she also told me that he left here two days after the murder."

"That's as true as true," cried Mrs. Bensusan, "ain't it, Rhoda? We lost him 'cause he said he couldn't abide living near a house where a crime had been committed."

"Well, then," continued Lucian, seeing that Rhoda, without speaking, continued to watch him, "the coincidence of Mr. Wrent's stay with that of Mr. Vrain's strikes me as peculiar!"

"You are a sharp one, you are!" said Rhoda with an approving nod. "Look here, Mr. Denzil, would you break a promise?"

"That depends upon what the promise was."

"It was one I made to hold my tongue."

"About what?"

"Several things," said the girl shortly.

"Have they to do with this crime?" asked Lucian eagerly.

"I don't know. I can't say," said Rhoda, then suddenly her face grew black. "I tell you what, sir, I hate Mr. Wrent!" she declared.

"Oh, Rhoda," cried Mrs. Bensusan. "After the lovely cloak he gave you."

The red-haired girl looked contemptuously at her mistress; then, without a word, darted out of the room. Before Lucian could conjecture the reason of her strange conduct, or Mrs. Bensusan could get her breath again—

a very difficult operation for her—Rhoda was back with a blue cloth cloak, lined with rabbit skins, hanging over her arm. This she threw down att he feet of Lucian, and stamped on it savagely with the carpet slippers.

"There's his present," she cried angrily, "but I wish I could dance on him the same way; I wish—I wish I could hang him."

"Can you?" demanded Lucian swiftly, taking her in the moment of wrath when she seemed disposed to speak.

"No!" said Rhoda shortly, "I can't."

"Do you think he killed Mr. Vrain?"

"No, I don't."

"Do you know who did?"

"Blest if I do!"

"Does Mr. Wrent?" asked Denzil meaningly.

The girl wet her finger and went through a childish game. "That's wet!" she said; then wiping the finger on her dingy skirts, "that's dry. Cut my throat if I tell a lie. Ask me something easier, Mr. Denzil!"

"I don't understand you," said Lucian quite puzzled.

"Rhoda! Rhoda! 'ave you gone crazy?" wailed Mrs. Bensusan.

"Look here!" said the girl, taking no notice of her mistress, "do you want to know about Mr. Wrent?"

"Yes, I do."

"And about that side passage as you talked of to the missis?"

"Yes!"

"Then I'll answer yer questions, sir. You'll know all I know."

"Very good," said Lucian with an approving smile, "now you are talking like a sensible girl."

"Rhoda! you ain't going to talk bad of Mr. Wrent?"

"It ain't bad and it ain't good," replied Rhoda, it's betwixt and between!"

"Well, I must 'ear all. I don't want the character of the house took away," said Mrs. Bensusan with an attempt at firmness.

"That's all right," rejoined Rhoda

reassuringly, "you can jine in yerself when y' like. Fire away, Mr. Denzil."

"Who is Mr. Wrent?" asked Lucian going straight to the point.

"I don't know," replied Rhoda; and henceforth the examination proceeded as though the girl were in the witness-box, and Lucian counsel for the prosecution.

Q. When did he come to Jersey Street?

A. At the end of July last year.

Q. When did he go away?

A. The morning after Boxing Day.

Q. Can you describe his appearance?

A. He was of the middle height with a fresh complexion, white hair and a white beard growing all over his face. He was untidy about his clothes and kept a good deal to his own room among a lot of books. I don't think he was quite right in his head.

Q. Did he pay his rent regularly?

A. Yes; except when he was away. He would go away for a week at a time.

Q. Was he in this house on Christmas Eve?

A. Yes, sir. He came back two days before Christmas.

Q. Where had he been?

A. I don't know; he did not say.

Q. Did he have any visitors?

A. He did. A tall dark man and a lady.

Q. What was the lady like?

A. A little woman; I never saw her face as she always kept her veil down.

Q. What kind of a veil did she wear?

A. A black gauze veil with velvet spots.

Q. Did she come often to see Mr. Wrent?

A. Yes! Four or five times

Q. When did she call last?

A. On Christmas Eve!

Q. At what hour?

A. She came at seven and went

away at eight. I know that because she had supper with Mr. Wrent.

Q. Did she leave the house?

A. Yes. I let her out myself.

Q. Did you ever hear any conversation between them?

A. No. Mr. Wrent took care of that. I never got any chance of listening at keyholes with him. He was a sharp one for all his craziness.

Q. What was the male visitor like?

A. He was tall and dark with a black moustache.

Q. Do you think he was a foreigner?

A. I don't know. I never heard him speak. Mr. Wrent let him in and out himself.

Q. When did he visit Mr. Wrent last?

A. On Christmas Eve; he came with the lady.

Q. Did he stay to supper also?

A. No. He went away at half-past seven. Mr. Wrent let him out as usual.

Q. Did he go away altogether?

A. I—I—I am not sure! (here the witness hesitated).

Q. Why did Mr. Wrent give you the cloak?

A. To make me hold my tongue about the dark man.

Q. Why?

A. Because I saw him in the back yard.

Q. On what night?

A. On the night of Christmas Eve about half-past eight!

CHAPTER XVI

MRS. VRAIN AT BAY

" You saw the dark man in the back yard on Christmas Eve ? " repeated Lucian, much surprised by this discovery.

" Yes, I did, " replied Rhoda decisively, " at half-past eight o'clock. I went out into the yard to put some empty bottles into the shed ; and I saw the man standing near the fence looking at the back of No. 13. When he heard me coming out he rushed past me and out by the side passage. The moon was shining and I saw him as plain as plain."

" Did he seem afraid ? "

" Yes, he did ; and didn't want to be seen neither. I told Mr. Wrent and he promised me a cloak if I held my tongue. He said the dark man was waiting in the yard until the lady had gone, when he was coming in again."

" But the lady, you say, went at eight and you saw the man half an hour later."

" That's it, sir ! He told me a lie, for he never came in again to see Mr. Wrent."

" But already the dark man had seen the lady ? "

" Yes ; he came in with her at seven and went away at half-past."

Lucian mechanically stooped down and picked up the fur cloak. He was puzzled by the information given by Rhoda, and did not exactly see what use to make of it. Going by the complexion of the man who had lurked in the back yard, it would appear that he was Count Ferruci ; while the small stature of the woman, and the fact that she wore a velvet spotted veil indicated that she was Lydia Vrain ; also the pair had been in the

vicinity of the haunted house on the night of the murder ; and, although it was true, both were out of the place by half-past eight ; yet they might not have gone far, but had probably returned later—when Rhoda and Mrs. Bensusan were asleep—to murder Vrain between the hours of eleven and twelve on the same night.

This was all plain enough, but Lucian was puzzled by the account of Mr. Wrent. Who, he asked himself repeatedly, who was this grey-haired white-bearded man who had so often received Lydia, who had on Christmas Eve silenced Rhoda regarding Ferruci's presence in the yard by means of the cloak, and who—it would seem—possessed the key to the whole mystery ?

Rhoda could tell no more but that he had stayed six months with Mrs. Bensusan and had departed two days after the murder ; whereby it would seem that his task having been completed, he had no reason to remain longer in so dangerous a neighbourhood. Yet four months had elapsed since his departure, and Denzil, after some reflection, asked Mrs. Bensusan a question or so regarding this interval.

" Has Mr. Wrent returned here since his departure ? " he demanded.

" Lawks, no, sir ! " wheezed Mrs. Bensusan shaking her head. " I've never set eyes on him since he went. 'Ave you, Rhoda ? " whereat the girl shook her head also, and watched Lucian with an intensity of gaze which somewhat discomposed him.

" Did he owe you any money when he went, Mrs. Bensusan ? "

" No, sir ; he paid up like a gentleman. I always thought well of Mr. Wrent."

" Rhoda doesn't seem to share your sentiments," said Denzil drily.

" No, I don't," cried the servant frowning. " I hated Mr. Wrent ! "

" Why did you hate him ? "

" Never you mind, sir," retorted Rhoda grimly. " I hated him."

" Yet he bought you this cloak ? "

"No, he didn't," contradicted the girl, "he got it from the lady."

"What!" cried Lucian sharply, "are you sure of that?"

"I can't exactly swear to it," replied Rhoda hesitating, "but it was this way. The lady wore a cloak like that, and I admired it awful. She had it on when she came Christmas Eve, and she didn't wear it when I let her out, and the next day Mr. Wrent gave it to me. So I suppose it is the same cloak."

"And did the lady go out into the cold winter weather without the cloak?"

"Yes; but she had a long cloth jacket on, sir, so I don't s'pose she missed it."

"Was the lady agitated when she went out?"

"I don't know. She held her tongue and kept her veil down."

"Can you tell me anything more?" asked Lucian, anxious to make the examination as exhaustive as possible.

"No, Mr. Denzil," answered Rhoda after some thought, "I can't; except that Mr. Wrent long before Christmas promised me a present, and gave me the cloak then."

"Will you let me take this cloak away with me?"

"If you like," replied Rhoda carelessly. "I don't want it."

"Oh, Rhoda!" wailed Mrs. Bensusan, "your lovely, lovely rabbit skin."

"I'll bring it back again," said Lucian hastily. "I only want to use it as evidence."

"Ye want to know who the lady is?" said Rhoda sharply.

"Yes, I do; can you tell me?"

"No, but you'll find out from that cloak. I guess why you're taking it."

"You are very sharp, Rhoda," said Lucian, rising with a good-humoured smile, "and well deserve your local reputation. If I find Mr. Wrent, I may require you to identify him; and Mrs. Bensusan also."

"I'll be able to do that, but missus hasn't her eyes much."

"Hasn't her eyes?" repeated Den-

zil, with a glance at Mrs. Bensusan's staring orbs.

"Lawks, sir, I'm short sighted, though I never lets on. Rhoda, 'ow can you 'ave let on to the gentleman as I'm deficient? As to knowing Mr. Wrent, I'd do so well enough," said Mrs. Bensusan, tossing her head, "with his long white beard and white 'ead, let alone his black velvet skull cap."

"Oh, he wore a skull cap?"

"Only indoors," said Rhoda sharply, "but here I'm 'olding the door wide, sir, so if you've done, we're done."

"I'm done, as you call it, for the present," replied Denzil, putting on his hat, "but I may come again. In the meantime hold your tongues. Silence on this occasion will be gold; speech won't even be silver."

Mrs. Bensusan laughed at this speech in a fat and comfortable sort of way, while Rhoda grinned and escorted Lucian to the front door. She looked so uncanny with her red hair and black eyes that the barrister could not forbear a question.

"Are you English, my girl?"

"No, I ain't," retorted Rhoda emphatically; "I'm of the gentle Romany."

"A gipsy!"

"So you Gorgios call us!" replied the girl, and shut the door with what seemed to be unnecessary violence. Lucian went off with the cloak over his arm, somewhat discomposed by this last piece of information.

"A gipsy!" he repeated, "humph! Can good come out of Nazareth? I don't trust that girl much! if I knew why she hates Wrent I'd be much more satisfied with her information. And who the deuce is Wrent?"

Lucian had occasion to ask himself this question many times before he found its answer, and that was not until afterwards. At the present moment he dismissed it from his mind as unprofitable. He was too busy reflecting on the evidence obtained in Jersey Street to waste time in conjecturing further events. On return-

ing to his lodging he sat down to consider what was best to be done.

After much reflection and internal argument, he decided to call upon Mrs. Vrain, and by producing the cloak, force her into confessing her share of the crime. Whether she had been the principal in the deed or an accessory before the fact, Lucian could not determine; but he was confident that in one way or another she was cognizant of the truth; although this she would probably conceal, as its revelation would likely be detrimental to her own safety.

At first Denzil intended to see Diana before visiting Mrs. Vrain, in order to relate all he had learned and find out from her if the cloak really belonged to the widow. But on second thoughts he decided not to do so.

"I can tell her nothing absolutely certain about the matter," he said to himself, "as I cannot be sure of anything until I force Mrs. Vrain to confess. Diana," so he called her in his discourse to himself, "Diana will probably know nothing about the ownership of the cloak, as it seems new and was probably purchased by Lydia during the absence of Diana in Australia. No! I have the address of Mrs. Vrain which Diana gave me. It will be best to call on her, and by displaying the cloak make her acknowledge her guilt.

"With such evidence she cannot deny that she visited Wrent; and was in the vicinity of the house wherein her husband was murdered on the very night the crime was committed. Also she must state Ferruci's reason for hiding in the back yard; and tell me plainly who Wrent is, and why he helped the pair of them in their devilish plans. I am doubtful if she will speak; but altogether the evidence I have collected inculpates her so strongly that it will be quite sufficient grounds upon which to obtain a warrant for her arrest. And sooner than risk that, I expect she will tell as much as she can to exculpate herself—that is, if she is really innocent. If she

is guilty," Lucian shrugged his shoulders, "then I cannot guess what course she will take."

Mrs. Vrain, with her father to protect her, had established herself in a small but luxurious house in Mayfair; and was preparing to enjoy herself during the coming season. Although her husband had met with a terrible death scarcely six months before, she had already cast off her heavy mourning, and wore only such millinery indications of sorrow as suited with her widowed existence.

Ferruci was a constant visitor at the house; but although Lydia was now free and wealthy she by no means seemed ready to marry the Italian. Perhaps she thought with her looks and riches she might gain an English title as more valuable than a Continental one; and in this view she was supported by her father. Clyne had no other desire than to see his beloved Lydia happy, and would willingly have sacrificed everything in his power to gain such an end; but as he did not like Ferruci himself, and saw that Lydia's affections towards him had cooled greatly, he did not encourage the idea of a match between them.

However, these matters were yet in abeyance, as Lydia was too diplomatic to break off with so subtle a man as the Count, who might prove a dangerous enemy were his love turned to hate, and Mr. Clyne was quite willing to remain on friendly terms with the man so long as Lydia chose that such friendship should exist. In short Lydia ruled her simple father with a rod of iron, and coaxed Ferruci—a more difficult man to deal with—into good humour; so she managed both of them skilfully in every way and contrived to keep things smooth pending her plunge into London society. For all her childish looks Lydia was uncommonly clever.

When Lucian's card was brought in, Mrs. Vrain proved to be at home; and as his good looks had made a deep impression on her, she received him at once. He was shown into a luxu-

riously furnished drawing-room without delay, and welcomed by pretty Mrs. Vrain herself, who came forward with a bright smile and outstretched hands looking more charming than ever.

"Well, I do call this real sweet of you," said she gaily; "I guess it is about time you showed up. But you don't look well, that's a fact. What's wrong?"

"I'm worried a little," replied Lucian confounded by her coolness.

"That's no use, Mr. Denzil; you should never be worried. I guess I don't let anything put me out."

"Not even your husband's death?"

"That's rude!" said Lydia sharply, the colour leaving her cheek. "What do you mean? Have you come to be nasty?"

"I came to return you this," said Denzil, throwing the cloak which he had carried on his arm before the widow.

"This?" echoed Mrs. Vrain looking at it. "Well, what's this old thing got do with me?"

"It's yours; you left it in Jersey Street!"

"Did I? and where's Jersey Street?"

"You know well enough," said Lucian sternly; "it is near the place where your husband was murdered."

Mrs. Vrain turned white. "Do you dare to say—" she began when Denzil cut her short with a hint at her former discomposure.

"The stiletto, Mrs. Vrain; don't forget the stiletto."

"Oh, God!" cried Lydia trembling violently, "what do you know of the stiletto?"

CHAPTER XVII

A DENIAL

"WHAT do you know of the stiletto?" repeated Mrs. Vrain anxiously.

She had risen to her feet, and, with an effort to be calm, was holding on to the near chair. Her bright colour had faded to a dull white hue; and her eyes had a look of horror in their depths which transformed her from her childish beauty into a much older and more haggard woman than she really was. It seemed as though Lucian by some necromantic spell had robbed her of youth, vitality, and careless happiness. To him this extraordinary agitation was a proof of her guilt; and hardening his heart so as not to spare her one iota of her penalty—a mercy she did not deserve—he addressed her sternly.

"I know that a stiletto purchased in Florence by your late husband hung on the library wall of Berwin Manor. I know that it is gone!"

"Yes! yes!" said Lydia moistening her white dry lips, "it is gone; but I do not know who took it!"

"The person who killed your husband."

"I feared as much!" she muttered sitting down again. "Do you know the name of the person?"

"As well as you do yourself. The name is Lydia Vrain."

"I!" She threw herself back on the chair with a look of profound astonishment on her colourless face. "Mr. Denzil," she stammered, "is—is this—is this a jest?"

"You will not find it so, Mrs. Vrain."

The little woman clutched the arms of her chair and leaned forward with her face no longer pale, but red with rage and indignation. "If you are a gentleman, Mr. Denzil, I guess you

won't keep me hanging on like this. Let us get level. Do you say I killed Mark?"

"Yes, I do!" said Lucian defiantly. "I am sure of it."

"On what grounds?" asked Mrs. Vrain holding her temper back with a visible effort, that made her eyes glitter, and her breath short.

"On the grounds that he was killed with that stiletto and—"

"Go slow! how do you know he was killed with that stiletto?"

"Because the ribbon which attached it to the wall was found in the Geneva Square house where your husband was killed. Miss Vrain recognised it."

"Miss Vrain!—Diana! Is she in England?"

"Not only in England, but in London."

"Then why hasn't she been to see me?"

Denzil did not like to answer this question; the more so as Lydia's sudden divergence from the point of discourse rather disconcerted him. It is impossible to maintain dignity in making a serious accusation when the person against whom it is made thinks so little of it as to turn aside to discuss a point of etiquette in connection with another woman.

Seeing that her accuser was silent and confused, Lydia recovered her tongue and colour, and the equability of her temper. It was, therefore, with some raillery that she continued her speech.

"I see how it is," she said contemptuously. "Diana has called you into her councils in order to fix this absurd charge on to me. Afraid to come herself, she sends you as the braver person of the partnership. I congratulate you on your errand, Mr. Denzil."

"You can laugh as much as you please, Mrs. Vrain; but the matter is more serious than you suppose."

"Oh, I am sure that my loving step-daughter will make it as serious as possible. She always hated me."

"Pardon me, Mrs. Vrain!" said Lucian, colouring with annoyance,

"but I did not come here to hear you speak ill of Miss Vrain."

"I know that! She sent you here to speak ill of me and do ill to me. Well, so you and she accuse me of killing Mark. I shall be glad to hear the evidence you can bring forward. If you can make your charge good I should smile. Oh, I guess so!"

Denzil noticed that when Mrs. Vrain became excited she usually spoke plain English without the U.S.A. accent, but on growing calmer, and as it were recollecting herself, she adopted the Yankee twang and their curious style of expression and ejaculation. This led him to suspect that the fair Lydia was not a born daughter of the Great Republic, perhaps not even a naturalised citizeness, but had assumed such nationality as one attractive to society in Europe and Great Britain.

He wondered what her past really was, and if she and her father were the doubtful adventurers Diana believed them to be. If so, it might happen that Lydia would extricate herself out of her present unpleasant position by the use of past experience. To give her no chance of such dodging Lucian rapidly detailed the evidence against her so that she would be hard put to baffle it. But in this estimate he quite underrated Lydia's nerve and capability of fence, let alone the dexterity with which she produced a satisfactory reply to each of his questions.

"We will begin at the beginning, Mrs. Vrain," he said soberly; "say from the time you drove your unfortunate husband out of his own house."

"Now, I guess that wasn't my fault," explained Lydia. "I wasn't in love with old man Mark, but I liked him well enough, for he was a real gentleman; and when that make-mischief Diana, who cocked her nose at me, set out for Australia we got on surprising well. Count Ferruci came over to stay as much at Mark's invitation as mine, and I didn't pay too much attention to him anyhow."

"Miss Tyler says you did!"

"Sakes!" cried Mrs. Vrain raising her eyebrows, "have you been talking to that old stump? Well, just you look here, Mr. Denzil; it was Bella Tyler who made all the mischief. She thought Ercole was sweet on her, and when she found out he wasn't, she got real mad, and went to tell Mark that I was making things hum the wrong way with the Count. Of course Mark had a row with him, and of course I got riz—not having done anything to lie low for. We had a row royal, I guess, and the end of it was that Mark cleared out. I thought he would turn up again, or apply for a divorce, though he hadn't any reason to. But he did neither, and remained away for a whole year. While he was away I got quit of Ercole pretty smart, I can tell you, as I wanted to shut up that old maid's mouth. I never knew where Mark was, or guessed what became of him until I saw that advertisement, and putting two and two together to make four I called to see Mr. Link, where I found you running the circus."

"Why did you faint on the mention of the stiletto?"

"I told you the reason, and Link also."

"Yes! but your reason was too weak to—"

"Oh, well you're right enough there," interrupted Lydia smiling. "All that talk of nerves and grief wasn't true. I didn't give my real reason, but I will now. When I heard that the old man had been stabbed by a stiletto I remembered that the one on the library wall had vanished some time before the Christmas Eve on which Mark was killed. So you may guess I was afraid."

"For yourself?"

"I guess not! it wasn't any of my funeral. I didn't take the stiletto, nor did I know who had; but I was afraid you might think Ferruci took it. The stiletto was Italian and the Count is Italian, so it struck me you might put two and two together and

suspect Ercole. I never thought you'd fix on me," concluded Lydia with a scornful toss of her head.

"As a matter of fact I fixed on you both," said Lucian composedly.

"And for what reason? Why should I and the Count murder poor Mark, if you please? He was a fool and a bore, but I wished him no harm. I was sorry as any one when I heard of his death, and I offered a good reward for the catching of the mean skunk that killed him. If I had done so myself I wouldn't have been such a fool as to sharpen the scent of the hounds on my own trail."

"You were in town on Christmas Eve?" said Denzil, not choosing to explain the motives he believed the pair had for committing the crime.

"I was; what of that?"

"You were in Jersey Street, Pimlico, on that night."

"I was never in Pimlico in my life," declared Lydia wrathfully, "and, as I said before, I don't know where Jersey Street is."

"Do you know a man called Wrent?"

"I never heard of him!"

"Yet you visited him in Jersey Street on Christmas Eve between seven and eight o'clock."

"Did I really?" cried Mrs. Vrain ironically, "and how can you prove I did?"

"By that cloak," said Lucian, pointing to where it lay on a chair. "You wore that cloak and a velvet spotted veil."

"I haven't worn a veil of that kind for over a year," said Lydia decisively, "though I admit I used to wear veils of that sort. You can ask my maid if I have any velvet spotted veils in my wardrobe just now. As to the cloak—I never wear rabbit skins."

"You might as a disguise."

"Sakes alive, man, what should I want with a disguise? I tell you the cloak isn't mine. You can soon prove that. Find out who made it, and go and ask in the shop if I bought it."

"How can I find out who made

it?" asked Denzil, who was beginning to feel that Lydia was one too many for him.

"Here, I'll show you," said Lydia, and picking up the cloak she turned over the tab at the neck, by which it was hung up; at the back of this there was a small piece of tape with printed black letters. "Baxter & Co., General Drapers, Bayswater," she read out, throwing down the cloak contemptuously. "I don't go to a London suburb for my frocks; I get them in Paris."

"Then you are sure this cloak isn't yours?" asked Lucian much perplexed.

"No! I tell you it isn't. Go and ask Baxter & Co. if I bought it. I'll go with you if you like, or better still, cried Mrs. Vrain, jumping up briskly, "I can take you to see some friends with whom I stayed on Christmas Eve. The whole lot will tell you that I was with them at Camden Hill all the night."

"What! can you prove an alibi?"

"I don't know what you call it," retorted Lydia coolly, "but I can prove pretty slick that I wasn't in Pimlico."

"But—Mrs. Vrain—your friend—Ferruci was there."

"Was he? Well, I don't know. I never saw him that time he was in town. But if you think he killed Mark you are wrong. I do not believe Ercole would kill a fly, for all he's an Italian."

"Do you think he took that stiletto?"

"No, I don't!"

"Then who did?"

"I don't know. I don't even know when it was taken. I missed it after Christmas because that old school ma'am told me it was gone."

"Old school ma'am!"

"Well, Bella Tyler, if you like that better," retorted Mrs. Vrain. "Come now, Mr. Denzil, I'm not going to let you away without proving my—what do you call it?—alibi. Come with me right along to Camden Hill."

"I'll come just to satisfy myself," said Lucian picking up the cloak, "but I am beginning to feel that it is unnecessary."

"You think I am innocent? Well," drawled Lydia as Lucian nodded, "I think that's real sweet of you. I mayn't be a saint, but I'm not quite the sinner that Diana of yours makes me out."

"Diana of mine, Mrs. Vrain?" said Lucian colouring.

The little woman laughed at his blush.

"Oh, I'm not a fool, young man. I see how the wind blows," and with a nod she vanished.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHO BOUGHT THE CLOAK?

MRS. VRAIN sacrificed the vanity of a lengthy toilette to a natural anxiety to set herself right with Lucian, and appeared shortly in a ravishing costume fresh from Paris. Perhaps by arraying herself so smartly, she wished to assure Mr. Denzil more particularly that she was a lady of too much taste to buy rabbit-skin cloaks in Bayswater: or perhaps—which was more probable—she was not averse to ensnaring so handsome a young man into an innocent flirtation.

The suspicion she entertained of Lucian's love for Diana only made Lydia the more eager to fascinate him on her own account. A conceit of herself, a hatred of her step-daughter, and a desire to wring admiration out of a man who did not wish to bestow

it: these were the reasons which led Mrs. Vrain to be particularly agreeable to the barrister. When the pair were ensconced in a swift hansom, and rolling rapidly towards Camden Hill she began at once to prosecute her amiable designs.

"I guess you'll not mind being my best boy for the day," she said with a coquettish glance. "You can escort me first of all to the Pegalls: and afterwards we can drive to Baxter & Co. in Bayswater, so that you can assure yourself I didn't buy that cloak."

"I am much obliged for the trouble you are taking, Mrs. Vrain," replied the young man, avoiding with some reserve the insinuating glances of his pretty companion. "We shall do as you suggest. Who are the Pegalls, may I ask?"

"My friends with whom I stopped on Christmas Eve," rejoined Mrs. Vrain, "a real good old dull English family as heavy as their own plum-puddings. Mrs. Pegall's a widow like myself, and I daresay she buys her frocks in the Bayswater stores. She has two daughters who look like barmaids and ought to be, only they ain't smart enough. We had a real Sunday at home on Christmas Eve, Mr. Denzil. Whist and weak tea at eight: negus and prayers and bed at ten. Poppa wanted to teach them poker and they kicked like mad at the very idea: but that was when he visited them before, I guess."

"Not the kind of family likely to suit you, I should think," said Lucian, regarding the little free lance with a puzzled air.

"I guess not: lead's a feather to them for weight. But it's a good thing to have respectable friends, especially in this slow coach of an old country where you size everybody up by the company they keep."

"Ah!" said Lucian pointedly and—it must be confessed—rather rudely, "so you have found the necessity of having respectable friends however dull."

"That's a fact," acknowledged Mrs. Vrain candidly. "I've had a queer sort of life with Poppa! ups and downs and flyings ever the moon, I guess."

"You are not American?" said Denzil suddenly.

"Sakes! how do you figure that out?"

"Because you are too pronouncedly Amurrican to be American."

"That's an epigram with some truth in it," replied Lydia coolly. "Oh, I'm as much a U.S.A. article as anything else. We hung out our shingle in Wyoming, Wis., for a considerable time; and a girl who tickets herself Yankee this side flies high. But I guess I'm not going to give you my history," concluded Mrs. Vrain, drily. "I'm not a Popey nor you a confessor."

"H'm! you've been in the South Seas, I see."

"There's no telling. How do you know?"

"The natives there use the word Popey to designate a Roman Catholic."

"You are as smart as they make 'em, Mr. Denzil; there's no flies about you; but I'm not going to give myself away. Ask Poppa if you want information. He's that simple he'll tell you all."

"Well, Mrs. Vrain, keep your own secret; it is not the one I wish to discover. By the way, you say your father was at Camden Hill on Christmas Eve?"

"I didn't say so, but he was," answered Lydia quietly. "He was not very well—Pop can't stand these English winters—and wrote me to come up. But he was so sick that he left the Pegalls about six o'clock."

"That was the letter which upset you."

"It was; I see old Bella Tyler kept her eyes peeled. I got the letter and came up at once. I've only got one parent left, and he's too good to be shoved away in a box underground while fools live. But here we are at the Pegalls. I hope you'll like the

kind of circus they run. Camp meetings are nothing to it."

The dwelling of the respectable family alluded to was a tolerably sized house of red brick placed in a painfully neat garden, and shut in from the high road by a tall and jealous fence of green painted wood. The stout widow and two stout spinster daughters who made up the inmates quite deserved Mrs. Vrain's epithet of "heavy." They were aggressively healthy, with red cheeks, black hair, and staring black eyes devoid of expression; a trio of Dutch dolls would have looked more intellectual. They were plainly and comfortably dressed; the drawing-room was plainly and comfortably furnished; and both house and inmates looked thoroughly respectable and eminently dull. What such a hawk as Mrs. Vrain was doing in this Philistine dove-cot Lucian could not conjecture; but he admired her tact in making friends with a family whose heavy gentility assisted to ballast her somewhat light reputation; while the three of their brains in unison could not comprehend her tricks, or the reasons for which they were played.

"At all events these three women are too honest to speak anything but the truth," thought Lucian while undergoing the ordeal of being presented. "So I'll learn for certain if Mrs. Vrain was really here on Christmas Eve."

The Misses Pegall and their lace-capped mamma welcomed Lucian with heavy good nature and much simpering, for they also had an eye to a comely young man; but the cunning Lydia they kissed and embraced and called "dear" with much zeal. Mrs. Vrain, on her part, darted from one to the other like a bird, pecking the red apples of their cheeks, and cast an arch glance at Lucian to see if he admired her talent for manoeuvring. Then cake and wine, port and sherry, were produced in the style of early Victorian hospitality, from which epoch Mrs. Pegall dated, and

all went merry as a marriage bell; while Lydia laid her plans to have herself exculpated in Lucian's eyes without being inculpated in those of the family.

"We have just come up from our place in Somerset," explained Mrs. Pegall in a comfortable voice. "The girls wanted to see the sights, so I just said 'we'll go, dears, and perhaps we'll get a glimpse of the dear Queen.' I'm sure she has no more loyal subjects than we three."

"Are you going out much this year, dear Mrs. Vrain?" asked Beatrice Pegall, the elder and plainer of the sisters.

"No, dear," replied Lydia with a sigh, putting a dainty handkerchief to her eyes; "you know what I have lost."

The two groaned, and Miss Cecilia Pegall, who was by way of being very religious in a Low Church way, remarked that "all flesh was grass," to which observation her excellent mamma rejoined—"Very true, dear, very true," and then the trio sighed again and shook their black heads like so many mandarins.

"I should never support my grief," continued Lydia, still tearful. "if it was not that I have at least three dear friends. Ah, I shall never forget that happy Christmas Eve."

"Last Christmas Eve, dear Mrs. Vrain," said Cecilia.

"When you were all so kind and good," sobbed Lydia with a glance at Lucian, to see that he noticed the confirmation. "We played whist, didn't we?"

"Four rubbers," groaned Mrs. Pegall, "and retired to bed at ten o'clock after prayers and a short hymn. Quite a carol that hymn was! eh, dears?"

"And your poor pa was so bad with his cough," said Beatrice, "I hope it is better. He went away before dinner, too. Do say your pa is better!"

"Yes, dear, much better," said Lydia, and considering it was four

months since Christmas Eve Lucian thought that it was time Mr. Clyne recovered.

"He enjoyed his tea though," said Cecilia. "Mr. Clyne always says there is no tea like ours."

"And no evenings," cried Lydia, who was very glad there were not; "Poppa and I are coming soon to have a long evening; to play whist again."

"But, dear Mrs. Vrain, you are not going?"

"I must, dears," with a kiss all round. "I have such a lot to do, and Mr. Denzil is coming with me, as Poppa wants to consult him about some law business. He's a barrister, you know."

"I hope Mr. Denzil will come and see us again," said Mrs. Pegall, shaking hands with Lucian: a fat puffy hand she had, and damp.

"Oh, delighted! delighted!" said Denzil hurriedly.

"Cards and tea and sensible conversation," said Beatrice seriously, "no more."

"You forget prayers at ten, dear." rejoined Cecilia in low tones.

"We are a plain family, Mr. Denzil. You must take us as we are."

"Thank you, Mrs. Pegall, I will."

"Good-bye, dears," cried Lydia again, and with a final peck all round, she skipped out and into the hansom, followed by her escort.

"Damn!" said Mrs. Vrain, when the cab drove away in the direction of Bayswater. "Oh, don't look so shocked, Mr. Denzil. I assure you I am not in the habit of swearing, but the extreme respectability of the Pegalls always makes me wish to relieve my feelings by going to the other extreme. What do you think of them?"

"They seem very good people and genuine."

"And very genteel and dull," retorted Lydia. "Like Washington, they can't tell a lie for a red cent; so you can believe I was there with

Poppa on Christmas Eve, only he went away and I stayed all night."

"Yes, I believe it, Mrs. Vrain."

"Then I couldn't have been in Jersey Street or Geneva Square sticking Mark with the stiletto?"

"No! I believe you to be innocent," said Lucian gravely. "In fact, I really don't think it is necessary to find out about this cloak at Baxter & Co. I am assured you did not buy it."

"I guess I didn't, Mr. Denzil; but you want to know who did, and so do I. Well! you need not open your eyes; I'd like to know who killed Mark also; and you say that cloak will show it."

"I didn't say that; but the cloak may identify the woman I wrongfully took for you. She may have to do with the matter."

Lydia shook her pretty head. "Not she. Mark was as respectable as the Pegall gang; there's no woman mixed up in this matter."

"But I saw the shadow of a woman on the blind of No. 13."

"You don't say! In Mark's sitting-room? Well, I should smile to know he was human after all; he was always so precious stiff."

Something in Mrs. Vrain's light talk of her dead husband jarred on the feelings of Lucian, and in some displeasure he held his peace. In no wise abashed Lydia feigned to take no notice of this tacit reproof, but chatted on about all and everything in the most frivolous manner. Not until they had entered the shop of Baxter & Co. did she resume attention to business.

"Here!" she said to the smiling shop-walker. "I want to know by whom this cloak was sold and to what person."

The man examined the cloak and noted a private mark on it, which evidently afforded him some information not obtainable by the general public; for he guided Lucian and his companion to a counter behind which stood a brisk woman with sharp eyes.

In her turn she also examined the cloak, and departed to refresh her memory by looking at some account book. When she returned it was to intimate that the cloak had been bought by a man.

"A man!" repeated Lucian much astonished. "What was he like?"

"A dark man!" replied the brisk shop woman, "dark hair, dark eyes and a dark moustache. I remember him well because he was a foreigner."

"A foreigner?" repeated Lydia in her turn. "A Frenchman?"

"No, madam—an Italian. He told me as much."

"Sakes alive," cried Mrs. Vrain. "You are right, Mr. Denzil. It's Ferruci sure enough."

he had two motives," said the barrister quickly. "In the first place, he was in love and wished to marry you; in the second, he was poor and wanted money. By the death of your husband he hoped to gain both."

"He has gained neither as yet," replied Lydia sharply. "I like Ercole well enough, and at one time I was almost engaged to him. But he has a nasty temper of his own, Mr. Denzil, so I shunted him pretty smart to marry Mark Vrain. I wouldn't marry him now if he dumped down a million dollars at my feet to-morrow. Besides, Poppa don't like him at all. I've got my money and I've got my freedom, and I don't fool away either the one or the other on that Italian dude."

"Is the Count acquainted with these sentiments?" asked Lucian drily.

"I guess so, Mr. Denzil. He asked me to marry him two months after Mark's death, and I just up and told him pretty plain how the cat jumped."

"In plain English, you refused him?"

"You bet I did," cried Lydia vigorously. "So you see, Mr. Denzil, he could not have killed Mark."

"Why not? He did not know your true mind until two months after the murder."

"That's a fact, anyhow," commented Mrs. Vrain, "but what the mischief made him buy that rabbit-skin cloak?"

"I expect he bought it for the woman I mistook for you."

"And who may she be?"

"That is just what I wish to find out. This woman who came to Jersey Street so often wore this cloak, therefore she must have obtained it from the Count. I'll make him tell me who she is and what she has to do with this crime."

"Do you think she has anything to do with it?" said Mrs. Vrain doubtfully.

"I am certain. It must have been her shadow I saw on the blind."

"And the man's shadow was the Count's?" questioned Lydia.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DEFENCE OF COUNT FERRUCI

"It is quite impossible," cried Mrs. Vrain distractedly. "I can't believe it nohow."

The little woman was back again in her own drawing-room talking to Lucian about the discovery which had lately been made regarding Ferruci's purchase of the cloak. Mrs. Vrain having proved her own innocence by the evidence of the Pegall family, was now trying to persuade both herself and Denzil that the Count could not be possibly implicated in the matter. He had no motive to kill Vrain, she said, a statement with which Lucian at once disagreed.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Vrain,

"I think so. He bought the cloak for the woman, visited the man Wrent at Jersey Street, and was seen by the servant in the back yard. He did not act thus without some object, Mrs. Vrain; you may be sure of that."

"Sakes!" said Lydia with a weary sigh. "I ain't sure of anything save that my head is buzzing like a saw-mill. Who is Wrent, anyhow?"

"I don't know. An old man with white beard and a skull-cap of black velvet."

"Ugh!" said Mrs. Vrain with a shiver. "Mark used to wear a black skull-cap, and the thought of it makes me freeze up. Sounds like a judge of your courts ordering a man to be lynched. Well, Mr. Denzil, it seems to me as you'd best hustle Erecole. If he knows who the woman is—and he wouldn't buy cloaks for her if he didn't—he'll know who this Wrent is. I guess he can supply all information."

"Where does he live?"

"Number 40, Marquis Street, St. James's. You go and look him up, while I tell Poppa what a mean white he is. I guess Poppa won't let him come near me again. Pop's an honest man, though he ain't no Washington."

"Suppose I find out that he killed your husband?" asked Lucian rising.

"Then you'd best lynch him right away," replied Lydia without hesitation. "I draw the line at murder. Some!"

The barrister was somewhat disgusted to hear Mrs. Vrain so coolly devote her whilom admirer to a shameful death. However, he knew that her heart was hard and her nature selfish; so there was little use in showing any outward displeasure at her want of charity. She had cleared herself from suspicion and evidently cared not who suffered, so long as she was safe and well spoken of. Moreover, Lucian had learned all he wished about her movements on the night of the crime; and taking a hasty leave,

he went off to Marquis Street for the purpose of bringing Ferruci to book for his share in the terrible business. However, the Count proved to be from home, and would not be back, so the servant said, until late that night.

Denzil therefore left a message that he would call at noon the next day, and drove from St. James's to Kensington, where he visited Diana. Here he detailed what he had learned and done from the time he had visited Mrs. Bensusan up to the interview with Lydia. Also he displayed the cloak and narrated how Mrs. Vrain had cleared herself of its purchase.

To all this Diana listened with the greatest interest, and when Lucian ended she looked at him for some moments in silence. In fact, Diana, with all her wit and common sense, did not know how to regard the present position of affairs.

"Well, Miss Vrain!" said Lucian, seeing that she did not speak. "What do you think of it all?"

"Mrs. Vrain appears to be innocent," said Diana in a low voice.

"Assuredly she is! the evidence of the Pegall family—given in all innocence—proves that she could not have been in Geneva Square or in Jersey Street on Christmas Eve."

"Then we come back to my original belief, Mr. Denzil. Lydia did not commit the crime herself, but employed Ferruci to do so."

"No," replied Denzil decidedly; "whether the Italian is guilty or not, Mrs. Vrain knows nothing about it. If she were cognisant of his guilt she would not have risked going with me to Baxter & Co., and letting me discover that Ferruci had bought the cloak. Nor would she so lightly surrender a possible accomplice as she has done Ferruci. Whatever can be said of Mrs. Vrain's conduct—and I admit that it is far from perfect—yet I must say that she appears by the strongest evidence to be totally innocent and ignorant. She knows no

more about the matter than her father does."

"Well!" said Diana, unwilling to grant her step-mother too much grace, "we must give her the benefit of the doubt. What about Ferruci?"

"So far as I can see, Ferruci is guilty," replied Lucian. "To clear himself he will have to give the same proof as Mrs. Vrain. Firstly, he will have to show that he was not in Jersey Street on Christmas Eve; secondly, he will have to prove that he did not buy the cloak. But in the face of the servant's evidence, and the statement of the shopwoman, he will find it difficult to clear himself. Yet," added Lucian, remembering his failure with Lydia, "it is always possible that he may do so."

"It seems to me, Mr. Denzil, that your only chance of getting at the truth is to see the Italian."

"I think so myself. I will see him to-morrow."

"Will you take Mr. Link with you?"

"No, Miss Vrain. As I have found out so much without Link, I may as well proceed in the matter until his professional services are required to arrest Count Ferruci. By the way, I have never seen that gentleman. Can you describe to me his appearance?"

"Oh, as far as looks go there is no fault to be found with him," answered Diana; "he is a typical Italian; tall, slender, and olive complexioned. He speaks English very well indeed, and appears to be possessed of considerable education. Certainly, to look at him, and to speak with him, you would not think he was a villain likely to murder a defenceless old man. But if he did not kill my poor father, I know not who did."

"I'll call on him to-morrow at noon," said Lucian, "and later on I shall come here to tell you what has passed between us."

This remark brought the business between them to a close; but Lucian would fain have lingered to engage

Diana in lighter conversation. Miss Vrain, however, was too much disturbed by the news he had brought her to indulge in frivolous talk. Her mind, busied with recollections of her deceased father, and anxiously seeking some means whereby to avenge his death, was ill-attuned to encourage at the moment the aspirations which she knew Lucian entertained.

The barrister therefore sighed and hinted in vain. His Dulcinea would have none of him or his courting; and he was compelled to retire, as disconsolate a lover as could be seen. To slightly alter the saying of Shakespeare, "the course of true love never does run smooth," but there were surely an unusual number of obstacles in the current of Denzil's desires. But as he consoled himself with reflecting that the greater the prize the harder it is to win, so it behoved him to do his *devoir* like a true knight.

The next day at noon Lucian, armed for the encounter with the evidence of Rhoda and of the cloak, presented himself at the rooms which Count Ferruci temporarily inhabited in Marquis Street. He not only found the Italian ready to receive him, but in full possession of the adventure of the cloak, which, as he admitted, he had learned from Lydia the previous evening. Also Count Ferruci was extremely indignant, and informed Lucian that he was easily able to clear himself of the suspicion. While he raged on in his fiery Italian way, Denzil, who saw no chance of staying the torrent of words, examined him at his leisure.

Ercole Ferruci was, as Diana had said, a singularly handsome man of thirty-five. He was dark, slender and tall, with dark flashing eyes, a heavy black moustache, and an alert military look about him which showed that he had served in the army. The above description savours a trifle of the impossible hero of a young lady's dream; and, as a matter of fact, Ferruci was not unlike that ideal personage. He had all the looks and graces which

women admire, and seemed honest and fiery enough in a manly way. The last person, as Lucian thought, to gain his aims by underhand ways, or to kill a helpless old man. But Lucian, legally experienced in human frailty, was not to be put off with voluble conversation and outward graces. He wished for proofs of innocence, and these he tried to obtain, as soon as Ferruci drew breath in his fiery harangue.

"If you are innocent, Count," said Lucian in reply to the fluent incorrect English of the Italian, "appearances are against you. However, you can prove yourself innocent if you will."

"Sir!" cried Ferruci, "is not my word good?"

"Not good enough for an English court," replied Lucian coldly. "You say you were not in Jersey Street on Christmas Eve. Who can prove that?"

"My friend—my dear friend Dr. Jorce of Hampstead, sir. I was with him; oh, yes, sir, he will tell you so."

"Very good, I hope his evidence will clear you," replied the more phlegmatic Englishman. "And this cloak?"

"I never bought the cloak! I saw it not before!"

"Then come with me to the shop in Bayswater, and hear what the girl who sold it says."

"I will come at once," cried Ferruci hastily, catching up his cane and hat, "come then, my friend, come. What does the woman say?"

"That she sold the cloak to a tall man—to a dark man with a moustache and one who told her he was Italian."

"Bah!" retorted the Count as they hailed a hansom, "is all that she can say! why all we Italians are supposed to be tall and dark and wear moustaches. Your common people in England never fancy one of us can be fair."

"You are not fair" replied Lucian

drily, "and your looks correspond to the description."

"True! oh, yes, sir!" but that description might describe a dozen of my countrymen. And, Mr. Denzil," added the Count laughing, "I do not go round about saying to common people that I am an Italian. It is not my custom to explain."

Lucian shrugged his shoulders and said no more until they entered the shop in Bayswater. As he knew from the previous visit where the saleswoman was located, he led the Count rapidly to the place. The girl was there, as brisk and business-like as ever. She looked up as they approached, and came forward to serve them with a swift glance at both.

"I am sorry to trouble you again," said Lucian ceremoniously, "but you told me yesterday that you sold a blue cloak lined with rabbit skin to an Italian gentleman, and—"

"And am I the gentleman?" interrupted Ferruci. "Did I buy a cloak?"

"No," replied the shopwoman after a sharp glance. "This is not the gentleman who bought the cloak."

CHAPTER XX

A NEW DEVELOPMENT

"You see, Mr. Denzil," said Ferruci turning triumphantly to Lucian, "I did not buy this cloak; I am not the Italian this lady speaks of."

Lucian was extremely astonished
D 2

at this unexpected testimony in favour of the Count, and questioned the shopwoman sharply. "Are you certain of what you say?" he asked looking at her intently.

"Yes, I am, sir," replied the girl stiffly, as though she did not like her word doubted. "The gentleman who bought the cloak was not so tall as this one! nor did he speak English well. I had great difficulty in learning what he wanted."

"But you said that he was dark, with a moustache—and—"

"I said all that, sir; but this is not the gentleman."

"Could you swear to it?" said Lucian, more chagrined than he liked to show to the victorious Ferruci.

"If it is necessary, I could, sir," said the shopwoman with the greatest confidence; and after so direct a reply and such certain evidence Denzil had nothing to do but retire from an awkward position as gracefully as he could.

"And now, sir," said Ferruci who had followed him out of the shop, "you come with me, please."

"Where to?" asked Lucian gloomily.

"To my friend—to my rooms. I have shown I did not buy the cloak you speak of. Now we must find my friend, Dr. Jorce, to tell you I was not at Jersey Street when you say."

"Is Dr. Jorce at your rooms?"

"I asked him to call about this time," said Ferruci glancing at his watch. "When Mrs. Vrain speak to me of what you say I wish to defend myself, so I write last night to my friend to talk with you this day. I get his telegram saying he would come at two hours."

Lucian glanced in his turn at his watch. "Half-past one," he said beckoning to a cab, "very good, Count, we will just have time to get back to your place."

"And what you think now?" said Ferruci with a malicious sparkle in his eyes.

"I don't know what to think," replied Lucian dismally, "save that it is a strange coincidence that *another* Italian should have bought the cloak."

The Count shrugged his shoulders as they got into the hansom, but he did not speak until they were well on their way back to Marquis Street. He then looked thoughtfully at his companion. "I do not believe coincidence," he said abruptly, "but in design."

"What do you mean, Count? I do not quite follow you."

"Some one who knows I love Mrs. Vrain wish to injure me," said the Italian rapidly, "and so make theirself like me to buy that cloak. Ah, you see! but he could not make himself as tall as me. Oh, yes, sir, I am sure it is so."

"Do you know anyone who would disguise himself so to implicate you in the murder?"

"No!" Ferruci shook his head. "I cannot think of onenman—not one."

"Do you know a man called Wrent?" asked Lucian abruptly.

"I do not, Mr. Denzil," said Ferruci at once; "why you ask?"

"Well, I thought he might be the man to disguise himself. But, no," added Lucian remembering Rhoda's account of Wrent's white hair and beard, "it cannot be him. He would not sacrifice his beard to carry out the plan; in fact he could not without attracting Rhoda's attention."

"Rhoda! Wrent! what strange names you talk of," cried Ferruci vivaciously.

"No stranger than that of your friend Jorce."

Ferruci laughed. "Oh, he is altogether most strange. You see!"

It was as the Italian said. Dr. Jorce—who was waiting for them in the Count's room—proved to be a small dried up atom of a man, who looked as though all the colour had been bleached out of him. At first sight he was more like a monkey

than a man, owing to his slight queer figure and agile movements ; but a closer examination revealed that he had a clever face, and a pair of most remarkable eyes. These were of a steel grey hue with an extraordinary intensity of gaze ; and when he fixed them on Lucian at the moment of introduction the young barrister felt as though he were being mesmerised.

For the rest Jorce was dressed sombrely in black cloth, was extremely voluble and vivacious, and impressed Lucian with the idea that he was less a fellow-mortals than a changeling from fairyland. Quite an exceptional man was Dr. Jorce, and, as the Italian said, "most strange."

"My good friend," said Ferruci, laying his stern hand on the shoulder of this oddity, "this gentleman wishes you to decide a—what do you say ?—bet ?"

"A bet ?" cried the little doctor in a deep bass voice, but with some indignation, "do I understand, Count, that you have brought me all the way from my place in Hampstead to decide a bet ?"

"Ah, but, sir, it is a bet most important," said Ferruci with a smile, "this Mr. Denzil declares that he saw me in Pim—Pim—what ?"

"In Pimlico," said Lucian, seeing that Ferruci could not pronounce the word. "I say that the Count was in Pimlico on Christmas Eve."

"You are wrong, sir," said Jorce with a wave of his skinny hand, "my friend, Count Ferruci, was in my house at Hampstead on that evening."

"Was he ?" remarked Lucian, astonished at this confident assertion, "and at what time did he leave ?"

"He did not leave until next morning," replied Jorce. "My friend, the Count, remained under my roof all night, and left at twelve o'clock on Christmas morning."

"So you see," said Ferruci airily to

Lucian, "that I could not have done what you think, as that was done—by what you said—between eleven and twelve on that night."

"Was the Count with you at ten o'clock on that evening ?" asked Denzil.

"Certainly he was ; so you have lost your bet, Mr. Denzil. Sorry to bring you such bad fortune, but truth is truth, you know."

"Would you repeat this statement if I wished, Dr. Jorce ?"

"Why not ? Call on me at any time. 'The Haven, Hampstead' ; that address will always find me."

"Ah, but I do not think it will be necessary for Mr. Denzil to call on you, sir," interposed the Count rapidly ; "you can always come to me. Well, Mr. Denzil, are you satisfied ?"

"I am," replied Lucian. "I have lost my bet, Count, and I apologise. Good day, Dr. Jorce, and thank you Count Ferruci, I wish you good bye."

"Not even *au revoir* ?" said Ferruci mockingly.

"That depends upon the future," replied Lucian coolly ; and forthwith went away in low spirits at the downfall of his hopes. Far from revealing the mystery of Vrain's death, his late attempts to solve it had resulted in utter failure. Lydia had cleared herself ; Ferruci had proved himself innocent ; and Lucian could not make up his mind what was now to be done. Darkness was on all sides, and there was not a single beam of light to show the way.

In this dilemma he sought out Diana, as, knowing from experience that where a man's logic ends, a woman's instinct begins, he thought she might suggest some way out of the difficulty. On arriving at the Royal John Hotel he found that Diana was waiting for him with great impatience ; and hardly giving herself time to greet him she asked

how he had fared in his interview with Count Ferruci.

"Has that man been arrested, Mr. Denzil," she asked, almost as soon as Lucian sat down.

"No, Miss Vrain, I regret to say that he has not been arrested. To speak plainly, he has, so far as I can see, proved himself innocent."

"Innocent? and the evidence against him?"

"Is utterly useless. I brought him face to face with the woman who sold the cloak, and she denies that Ferruci bought it."

"But she said the buyer was an Italian?"

"She did; and dark, with a moustache. All the same she did not recognise the Count. She says the buyer was not so tall and spoke much worse English."

"Ferruci could make his English bad if he liked," said Diana, unwilling to be convinced.

"Probably; but he could not make his stature shorter. No, Miss Vrain, I am afraid that our Italian friend, in spite of the evidence against him, did not buy the cloak. That he resembles the purchaser in looks and nationality is either a coincidence or—"

"Or what?" asked Diana seeing that Lucian hesitated.

"Or design!" finished the barrister. "And indeed the Count himself is of this opinion. He believes that some one who wished to get him into trouble personated him."

"Has he any suspicions as to whom the person may be?"

"He says not," replied Lucian cautiously. "And I believe him; for if he did suspect any particular individual he certainly would gain nothing by concealment of the fact."

"H'm!" said Diana thoughtfully, "so that denial of the saleswoman disposes of the cloak's evidence. What about the Count's presence in Jersey Street on Christmas Eve?"

"He was not there!"

"But Rhoda, the servant, saw him both in the house and in the back yard."

"She saw a dark man with a moustache, but she could not say that he was a foreigner. She does not know Ferruci, remember. The man she saw must have been the same as the purchaser of the cloak."

"Where does Ferruci say he was?" asked Miss Vrain sceptically.

"At Hampstead visiting a friend."

"Oh, and what does the friend say?"

"He declares that the Count was with him on Christmas Eve and stayed all night."

"That is very convenient evidence for the Count, Mr. Denzil. Who is this accommodating friend?"

"A doctor called Jorce."

"Can his word be trusted?"

"So far as I can judge from his looks and a short acquaintance I should say so."

"It was half-past eight when the servant saw the dark man run out of the yard?"

"Yes!"

"And at half-past eight Ferruci was at Hampstead in the house of Dr. Jorce?"

"Not that I know of," said Lucian, remembering that he had asked Jorce the question rather generally than particularly, "but the doctor declared that Ferruci was with him at ten o'clock on that evening and did not leave him until next morning; so as your father was killed between eleven and twelve Ferruci must be innocent."

"It would seem so, if this doctor is to be believed," muttered Diana reflectively, "but judging by what you have told me, there is nothing to show that Ferruci was *not* in Pimlico at eight-thirty and was *not* the man whom the servant saw."

"Well, certainly he could get from Pimlico to Hampstead in an hour and a half. However, the main point about all this evidence is, that neither

Ferruci nor Lydia Vrain killed your father."

"No! no! that seems clear. Still! still! they know about it. Oh, I am sure of it. It must have been Ferruci who was in Pimlico on that night. If so, he knows who Wrent is, and why he stayed in Jersey Street."

"Perhaps, although he denies ever hearing the name of Wrent. But I would not be surprised if the man who could solve the mystery is—"

"Who? Who?"

"Doctor Jorce himself," said Lucian. "I feel sure of it."

CHAPTER XXI

TWO MONTHS PASS

UNWILLING to give up prosecuting the Vrain case while the slightest hope remained of solving its mystery, Lucian sought out Link, the detective, and detailed all the evidence he had collected since the constituted authorities had abandoned the matter. Although Mrs. Vrain and Ferruci had exculpated themselves entirely Denzil thought that Link, with his professional distrust and trained sense of ferreting out secrets, might discern better than himself whether such exculpations were warranted by circumstances.

Link heard all that Denzil had to

tell him with outward indifference and inward surprise; for while unwilling, through jealousy of an amateur, to flatter the barrister by a visible compliment, yet he silently admitted that Denzil had made his discoveries and profited by them with much acuteness. What annoyed him, however, was that the young man had pushed his inquiries to the uttermost limit; and that there was no chance of any glory accruing to himself by prosecuting them further. Still on the possibility that something might come of it, he went over the ground already traversed by the amateur detective.

"You should have told me of your intentions when Miss Vrain spoke to you in the first instance," he said to Lucian by way of rebuke. "As it is, you have confused the clues so much that I do not know which one to take."

"It seems to me that I have pursued each clue until fate or circumstance clipped it short," retorted Lucian, nettled by this injustice. "Mrs. Vrain has defended herself successfully, much in the same way as Count Ferruci has done. Your only chance of getting at the truth lies in discovering Wrent; and unless Rhoda helps you there I do not see how you can trace the man."

"I am of a different opinion," said Link, lying freely to conceal his doubts of success in the matter. "As you have failed through lack of experience I shall attempt to unravel this skein."

"You attempted to do so before, and gave it up because of the tangle," said Lucian with quiet irony. "And unless you discover more than I have done, you will dismiss the matter again as impossible. So far as I can see, the mystery of Vrain's death is more of a mystery than ever, and will never be solved."

"I'll make one last attempt to unriddle it, however," answered Link with a confidence he was far from

feeling, "but, of course—not being one of your impossible detectives of fiction—I may fail."

"You are certain to fail," said Lucian decisively, and with this disheartening prophecy he left Link to his task of—apparently—spinning ropes of sand.

Whether it was that Link was so doubtful of the result as to expend little energy in the search, or whether he really found the task impossible of accomplishment, it is difficult to say, but assuredly he failed as completely as Lucian predicted. With outward zeal he set to work; interviewed Lydia and the Italian to make certain that their defence was genuine; examined the Pegall family, who were dreadfully alarmed by their respectability being intruded upon by a common detective, and obtained a fresh denial from Baxter & Co.'s saleswoman that Ferruci was the purchaser of the cloak. Also he cross-questioned Mrs. Bensusan and her sharp handmaid in the most exhaustive manner, and did his best to trace out the mysterious Wrent who had so much to do with the matter. He even called on Dr. Jorce at Hampstead to satisfy himself as to the actual time of Ferruci's arrival in that neighbourhood on Christmas Eve! But here he received a check, for Jorce had gone abroad on his annual holiday, and was not expected back for a month.

In fact, Link did all that a man could do to arrive at the truth, only to find himself at the end of his labours in the same position as Lucian had been. Disgusted at this result, he threw up his brief and called upon Diana and Denzil, with whom he had previously made an appointment, to notify his inability to bring the matter to a satisfactory conclusion.

"There is not the slightest chance of finding the assassin of Mr. Vrain," said Link after he had set forth at length his late failures. "The more I go into the matter the more I see it."

"Yet you were so confident of

doing more than I," said Lucian quietly.

Link turned sulky, after the fashion of a bad loser.

"I did my best," he retorted gloomily. "No man can do more. Some crimes are beyond the power of the law to punish for sheer lack of proof. This is one of them; and, so far as I can see, this unknown assassin will be punished on Judgment Day, not before."

"Then you don't think that Signor Ferruci is guilty?" said Diana.

"No! he has had nothing to do with the matter; nor has Mrs. Vrain brought about the death in any way."

"You cannot say who killed my father?"

"Not for certain, but I suspect Wrent."

"Then why not find Wrent?" asked Diana bluntly.

"He has hidden his trail too well," began Link, "and—and—"

"And if you did find him," finished Denzil coolly, "he might prove himself guiltless, after the fashion of Mrs. Vrain and Ferruci."

"He might, sir: there is no knowing. But since you think I have done so little, Mr. Denzil, let me ask you who it is you suspect."

"Dr. Jorce of Hampstead!"

"Pooh! Pooh!" cried Link with contempt. "He didn't kill the man: how could he, seeing he was at Hampstead on that Christmas Eve midnight as I found out from his servants?"

"I don't suspect him of actually striking the blow," replied Lucian, "but I believe he knows who did."

"Not he! Dr. Jorce has too responsible a position to mix himself up in a crime from which he gains no benefit."

"Why! what position does he hold?"

"He is the owner of a private lunatic asylum. Is it likely that a man like him would commit a murder?"

"Again I deny that he did commit the crime; but I am certain, from the

very fact of his friendship with Feruci, that he knows more than he chooses to tell. Why should the Italian be intimate with the owner of a private asylum,—with a man so much beneath him in rank?"

"I don't know, sir. But if you suspect Dr. Jorce you had better see him when he comes back from his holidays—in a month."

"Where is he now?"

"In Italy, and the Count has gone with him."

Diana and Lucian looked at one another, and the former spoke. "That is strange," she said. "I agree with Mr. Denzil: it is peculiar, to say the least of it, that an Italian noble should make a bosom friend of a man so far inferior to him in position. Don't you think so yourself, Mr. Link?"

"Madam," said Link gravely, "I think nothing about it, save that you will never find out the truth. I have tried my best and failed, and I am confident enough in my own power to say that where I have failed no one else will succeed. Miss Vrain, Mr. Denzil, I wish you good day."

And with this bragging speech, which revealed the hurt vanity of the man, Mr. Link took his departure. Lucian held his peace, for in the face of this desertion of a powerful ally he did not know what to say. Diana walked to the sitting-room window and watched Link disappear into the crowd of passers-by. At that she heaved a sigh, for with him—she thought—went every chance of learning the truth, since if he, an experienced person in such matters, turned back from the quest, there could assuredly be no help in any one not professional and with less trained abilities.

Then she turned to Lucian.

"There is nothing more to be done, I suppose," said she, sighing again.

"I am afraid not," replied Lucian dismally, for he was quite of her

opinion regarding the desertion of the detective.

"Then I must leave this unknown assassin to the punishment of God," said Diana quietly. "And I can only thank you for all you have done for me, Mr. Denzil, and say"—she hesitated and blushed, then added with some emphasis—"say *au revoir*."

"Ah!" ejaculated Denzil with an indrawn breath of relief, "I am glad you did not say good-bye."

"I don't wish to say it, Mr. Denzil. I have not so many friends in the world that I can afford to lose so good a one as yourself."

"I am content," said Lucian softly, "that you should think of me as your friend—for the present."

His meaning was so unmistakable that Diana, still blushing and somewhat confused, hastened to prevent his saying more at so awkward a moment. "Then as my friend I hope you will come and see me at Berwin Manor."

"I shall be delighted. When do you go down?"

"Within a fortnight. I must remain that time in town to see my lawyer about the estate left by my poor father."

"And see Mrs. Vrain?"

"No!" replied Diana coldly. "Now that my father is dead Mrs. Vrain is nothing to me. Indirectly I look upon her as the cause of his death, for if she had not driven both of us out of our own home my father might have been alive still. I shall not call on Mrs. Vrain, and I do not think she will dare to call on me."

"I'm not so sure of that," rejoined Lucian, who was well acquainted with the lengths to which Mrs. Vrain's audacity would carry her, "but let us dismiss her with all your other troubles. May I call on you again before you leave town?"

"Occasionally," replied Diana, smiling and blushing; "and you will come down to Berwin Manor when I send you an invitation?"

"I should think so," said Denzil in high glee as he rose to depart, "and now I will say——"

"Good-bye?" said Miss Vrain, holding out her hand.

"No. I'll use your own form of farewell, *au revoir*."

Then Lucian went out from the presence of his beloved, exulting that she had proved so kind as not to dismiss him when she no longer required his services. In another woman he would not have minded such ingratitude, but had Diana banished him thus he would have been miserable beyond words. Also, as Lucian joyfully reflected, her invitation to Berwin Manor showed that far from wishing to lose sight of him, she desired to draw him into yet closer intimacy. There could be nothing but good resulting from her invitation and his acceptance, and already Denzil looked forward to some bright summer's day in the green and leafy country when he should ask this goddess among women to be his wife. If encouragement and looks and blushes went for anything he hardly doubted the happy result.

In the meantime, while Lucian dreamed his dreams, Diana, also dreaming in her own way, remained in town and attended to business. She saw her lawyers, and had her affairs looked into, so that when she went to Bath she was legally installed as the mistress of Berwin Manor and its surrounding acres. As Lucian hinted, Lydia did indeed try to see her step-daughter. She called twice and was refused admission into Diana's presence! She wrote three times, and received no reply to her letters; so the consequence was that, finding Diana declined to have anything to do with her in any way whatsoever, she became very bitter. This feeling she expressed to Lucian, whom she one day met in Piccadilly.

"As if I had done anything," finished Lydia after a recital of all her

grievances. "I call it real mean. Don't you think so, Mr. Denzil?"

"If you ask me, Mrs. Vrain," said Lucian stiffly, "I think you and Miss Vrain are better apart."

"Of course you defend her. But I guess I can't blame you, as I know what you are driving at."

"What about Signor Ferruci?" asked Denzil parrying the question.

"Oh, we are good friends still, but nothing more. As he proved that he did not kill Mark, I've no reason to give him his walking ticket. But, added Mrs. Vrain drily, "I guess you'll be married to Diana before I hitch up up 'longside Ercole."

"How do you know I shall marry Miss Vrain?" asked Lucian, flushing.

"If you saw your face in a glass you wouldn't ask, I guess. Tomatoes ain't in it for redness. I won't dance at your wedding; and I won't break my heart either," and with a gay nod Mrs. Lydia Vrain tripped away, evidently quite forgetful of the late tragedy in her life.

CHAPTER XXII

AT BERWIN MANOR

THE heritage of Diana lay some miles from Bath in a pleasant wooded valley, through which meandered a placid and slow-flowing stream. On either side of this water stretched broad

meadow lands, flat and fertile, as well they might be, seeing they were of rich black loam and well drained withal. To the right these meadows were bounded by forest lands, the trees of which grew thickly up and over the ridge, and on the space where wood met fields was placed the manor ; a quaint square building of Georgian architecture, and some two centuries old.

Against the green of the trees its warm walls of red brick and sloping roof of bluish slate made a pleasant spot of colour. There stretched a terrace before it; beneath the terrace a flower garden and orchard; and below these the meadow lands, white with snow in winter, black in spring with ridgy furrows, and golden with grain in the hot days of summer. Altogether a lovely and peaceful spot, where a man could pass pleasant days in rural quiet, a hermitage of rest for the life-worn and heart-weary.

Here towards the end of summer came Lucian, to rest his brain after the turmoil of London, and to court his mistress under the most favourable circumstances. Diana had established herself in her ancestral home with a superannuated governess as a chaperon ; for without such guardianship she could hardly have invited the barrister to visit her. Miss Priscilla Barbar was a placid, silver-haired old dame, who, having taught Diana for many years, had returned, now that the American Mrs. Vrain had departed, to spend the rest of her days under the roof of her dear pupil.

She took a great fancy to Lucian, which was just as well, seeing what was the object of his visit, and complacently watched the growing attachment between the handsome young couple, who seemed so suited to one another. But her duties as chaperon were nominal, for when not pottering about the garden she was knitting in a snug corner, and when knitting failed to interest her she

slumbered quietly, in defiance of the etiquette which should have compelled her to make a third in the conversation of her young friends.

As for Lucian and his charming hostess, they found that they had so many tastes in common, and enjoyed each other's society so much, that they were hardly ever apart. Diana saw with the keen eyes of a woman that Lucian was in love with her, and let it be seen in a marvellously short space of time, and without much difficulty, that she was in love with him.

But even after Lucian had been at the manor a fortnight, and daily in the society of Diana, he spoke no word of love. Seeing how beautiful she was, and how dowered with lands and rents and horses, he began to ask himself whether it was not rather a presumption on his part to ask her to share his life. He had only three hundred a year—six pounds a week—and a profession in which, as yet, he had not succeeded ; so he could offer her very little in exchange for her beauty, wealth, and position.

The poor lover became quite pale with fruitless longing ; and his spirits fell so low that good Miss Priscilla one day drew him aside to ask about his health.

"For," said she, "if you are ill in body, Mr. Denzil, I know of some remedies—old woman's medicines you will call them, no doubt—which with the blessing of God may do you good."

"Thank you, Miss Barbar, but I am not ill in body, worse luck," and Lucian sighed.

"Why worse luck, Mr. Denzil ?" said the old lady severely, "that is an ungrateful speech to Providence."

"I would rather be ill in body than ill in mind," explained Denzil, blushing, for in some ways he was younger than his years.

"And are you ill in mind ?" asked Miss Priscilla with a twinkle in her eyes.

"Alas, yes! can you cure me?"

"No! For that cure I shall hand you over to Diana."

"Miss Priscilla!" and Lucian coloured again; this time with vexation.

"Oh, Mr. Denzil," laughed the governess, "because I am old you must not imagine that I am blind. I see that you love Diana."

"Better than my life!" cried the devoted lover with much fervour.

"Of course! that is the usual romantic answer to make. Well, why do you not tell Diana so, with any pretty additions your fancy suggests?"

"She might not listen to me," said this doubting lover dolefully.

"Very true," replied his consoler; "on the other hand she might. Besides, Mr. Denzil, however much the world may have altered since my youth, I have yet to learn that it is the lady's part to propose to the gentleman."

"But, Miss Barbar, I am poor."

"What of that? Diana is rich."

"Don't I know it? For that very reason I hesitate to ask her."

"Because you are afraid of being called a fortune-hunter, I suppose," said the old lady drily, "that shows a lack of moral courage which is not worthy of you, Mr. Denzil. Take an old woman's advice, young man, and put your fortunes to the test. Remember Montrose's advice in the song."

"You approve of my marrying Diana—I mean Miss Vrain?"

"From what I have seen of you, and from what Diana has told me about you, I could wish her no better husband. Poor girl, after the tragical death of her father and her wretched life with that American woman she deserves a happy future."

"And do you think—do you really think that she—that she—would be happy with—with me?"—stammered Lucian hardly daring to believe Miss Priscilla whose acquaintance with

him seemed too recent to warrant such trust.

The wise old woman laughed and nodded.

"Ask her yourself, my dear," she said patting his hand. "She will be able to answer that question better than I; besides, girls like to say 'yea,' or 'nay,' themselves."

This seemed to be good advice, and certainly none could have been more grateful to the timid lover. That very night he made up his mind to risk his fortunes by speaking to Diana. It was no easy matter for the young man to bring himself to do so: for cool, bold, and fluent as he was on ordinary occasions, the fever of love rendered him shy and nervous. The looks of Diana acted on his spirits as the weather does on a barometer. A smile made him jocund and hilarious a frown abashed him almost to gloom. And in the April weather of her presence he was as variable as a weather-cock. It is therefore little to be wondered at that one ordinarily daring should tremble to ask a question which might be answered in the negative. True, Miss Barbar's partisanship heartened him a trifle, but he still feared for the result. Cupid, as well as conscience, makes cowards of us all—and Lucian was a doubting lover.

Towards the end of his stay Miss Priscilla—as usual—fell asleep one evening after dinner, and Diana, feeling the house too warm, stepped out into the garden followed by Lucian. The sun had just set behind the undulating hills, and the clear sky to the zenith was of a pale rose colour, striped towards the western horizon with lines of golden cloud. In the east a cold blue prevailed, and here and there a star sparkled in the arch of the sky.

The garden was filled with floating shadows, which seemed to glide into it from the dark recesses of the near woods, and in a copse some distance away a nightingale was singing to his mate and filling the silence with

melody. The notes fluted sweetly through the still air, mingling with the sigh of the rising wind, and the musical splashing of the fountain. This shot up a pillar of silver water to a great height, and in descending sprinkled the near flower beds with its cold spray. All was inexpressibly beautiful to the eye and soothing to the ear—a scene and an hour for love. It might have been the garden of the Capulets and those who moved in it—the immortal lovers, as yet uncursed by Fate.

"Only three more days," sighed Lucian as he walked slowly down the path beside Diana, "and then that noisy London again."

"Perhaps it is as well," said Diana in her practical way, "you would rust here. But is there any need for you to go back so soon?"

"I must for my own peace of mind."

Diana started and blushed at the meaning of his tone and words.

Then she recovered her serenity and sat down on an old stone seat, near which stood a weather-beaten statue of Venus. Seeing that she kept silent in spite of his broad hint, Lucian—to bring matters to a crisis—resolved to approach the subject in a mythological way through the image of the goddess.

"I am sorry I am not a Greek, Miss Vrain," he said abruptly.

"Why?" said Diana, secretly astonished by the irrelevancy of the remark.

Lucian plucked a red rose from the bush which grew near the statue and placed it on the pedestal.

"Because I would lay my offering at the feet of the goddess and touch her knees to demand a boon."

"What boon would you ask?" said Diana in a low voice.

"I would beseech that in return for my rose of flowers, she would give me the rose of womanhood."

"A modest request. Do you think it would be granted?"

"Do you?" asked Lucian picking up the rose again.

"How can I reply to your parables or read your dark sayings?" said Diana, half in earnest, half in mirth.

"I can speak plainer if you permit it."

"If—if you like!"

The young man laid the rose on Diana's lap. "Then in return for my rose give me—youself."

"Mr. Denzil!" cried Diana, starting up, whereby the flower fell to the ground. "You—you surprise me!"

"Indeed, I surprise myself," said Lucian sadly. "That I should dare to raise my eyes to you is no doubt surprising."

"I don't see that at all," exclaimed Diana coldly. "I like to be woo'd like a woman, not honoured like a goddess."

"You are both woman and goddess! but—you are not angry?"

"Why should I be angry?"

"Because I—I love you!"

"I cannot be angry with—with—shall we say a compliment?"

"Oh, Diana!"

"Wait! wait!" cried Miss Vrain, waving back this too eager lover. "You cannot love me! You have known me only a month or two."

"Love can be born in an hour," cried Lucian eagerly. "I loved you on the first day I saw you! I love you now—I shall love you ever."

"Will you truly love me ever, Lucian?"

"Oh, my darling, can you doubt it? And you?" he looked at her hopefully.

"And I?" she repeated in a pretty mocking tone, "and I?"—with a laugh she bent and picked up the flower—"I take the rose and I give you—"

"Yourself!" cried the enraptured lover, and the next moment he was clasping her to his breast, "Oh, Diana! dearest! will you really be my wife?"

"Yes," she said softly, and kissed him.

For a few moments the emotions of both overcame them too much to permit further speech; then Diana sat down and made Lucian sit beside her.

"Lucian," she said in a firm voice, "I love you, and I shall be your wife—when you find out who killed my poor father."

"It is impossible," he cried in dismay.

"No! we must prosecute the search. I have no right to be happy while the wretch who killed him is still at large. We have failed hitherto, but we may succeed yet! and when we succeed I shall marry you."

"My darling!" cried Lucian in ecstasy; and then in a more subdued tone, "I'll do all I can to find out the truth. But after all, from what point can I begin afresh?"

"From the point of Mrs. Vrain," said Diana unexpectedly.

"Mrs. Vrain?" cried the startled Lucian. "Do you still suspect her?"

"Yes, I do."

"But she has cleared herself on the most undeniable evidence."

"Not in my eyes," said Diana obstinately, "if Mrs. Vrain is innocent how did she find out that the unknown man murdered in Geneva Square was my father?"

"By his assumption of the name of Berwin which was mentioned in the advertisement; also from the description of the body; and particularly by the mention of the cicatrice on the right cheek, and of the loss of the little finger of the left hand."

Diana started. "I never heard that about the little finger," she said hurriedly. "Are you sure?"

"Yes! I saw myself when I knew your father as Berwin that he had lost that little finger."

"Then, Lucian, you did *not* see my father."

"What?" cried Denzil, hardly able to credit her words.

"My father never lost a finger," cried Diana, starting to her feet. "Ah, Lucian, I now begin to see light. That man, who called himself Berwin, who was murdered, was not my father. No! I believe—on my soul, I believe, that my father Mark Vrain is alive."

CHAPTER XXIII

A STARTLING THEORY

WHEN Diana declared that her father yet lived, Lucian drew back from her in amazement, for of all impossible things said of this impossible case this saying of hers was the strangest and most incredible. Hitherto, not a suspicion had entered his mind but that the man so mysteriously slain in Geneva Square was Mark Vrain, and, for the moment, he thought that Diana was distraught to deny so positive a fact.

"It is impossible," said he, shaking his head, "quite impossible. Mrs. Vrain identified the corpse, and so did other people who knew your father well."

"As to Mrs. Vrain," said Diana contemptuously, "I quite believe she would lie to gain her own ends. And it may be that the man who died was like my father in the face, but—"

"He had the mark on his cheek!" interrupted Lucian, impatient of this obstinate belief in the criminality of Lydia.

"I know that mark well," replied Miss Vrain. "My father received it in a duel he fought in his youth when he was a student in a German University; but the missing finger—" She shook her head.

"He might have lost the finger while you were in Australia," suggested the barrister.

"He might," rejoined Diana doubtfully, "but it is unlikely. As to other people identifying the body, they no doubt did so by looking at the face and its scar. Still, I do not believe the murdered man was my father."

"If not, why should Mrs. Vrain identify the body as that of her husband?"

"Why? Because she wanted to get the assurance money."

"She may have been misled by the resemblance of the dead man to your father."

"And who provided that resemblance? My dear Lucian, I would not be at all surprised to learn that there was conspiracy as well as murder in this matter. My father left his home, and Lydia could not find him. I quite believe that. As she cannot prove his death she finds it impossible to obtain the assurance money; so what does she do?"

"I cannot guess," said Lucian, anxious to hear Diana's theory.

"Why, she finds a man who resembles my father, and sets him to play the part of the recluse in Geneva Square. She selects a man in ill-health and given to drink, that he may die the sooner; and, by being buried as Mark Vrain, give her the money she wants. When you told me of this man Berwin's coughing and drinking I thought it strange, as my father had no consumptive disease when I left him, and never during his life was he given to over-indulgence in drink. Now I see the truth. This dead man was Lydia's puppet."

"Even granting that this is so, which I doubt, Diana, why should the man be murdered?"

"Why?" cried Diana fiercely, "because he was not dying quickly enough for that woman's purpose. She did not kill him herself, if her alibi is to be credited, but she employed Ferruci to murder him."

"You forget, Signor Ferruci also proved an alibi."

"A very doubtful one," said Miss Vrain scornfully; "you did not ask that Dr. Jorce the questions you should have done. Go up to London now, Lucian, see him at Hampstead, and find out if Ferruci was at his house at eight o'clock on Christmas Eve. Then I shall believe him guiltless; till then, I hold him but the creature and tool of Lydia."

"Jorce declares that Ferruci was with him at the house when the murderer was committed."

"Can you believe that? Ferruci may have made it worth the while of this doctor to lie. And even granting that much, the presence of Ferruci at the Jersey Street house shows that he knew what was going to take place on that night, and, perhaps, arranged with another man to do the deed; either way you look at it he and Lydia are implicated."

"I tell you it is impossible, Diana," said Lucian, finding it vain to combat this persistent belief. "All this plotting of crime is such as is found in novels, not in real life—"

"In real life," cried Diana taking the words out of his mouth, "more incredible things take place than can be conceived by the most fantastic imagination of an author. Look at this talk of ours; it began with words of love and marriage speeches, and it ends with a discussion of murder. But this I say, Lucian, that if you love me, and would have me marry you, you must find out the truth of these matters. Learn if this dead man is my father—for from what you have told me of the lost finger I do not believe that he is. Hunt down the assassin and discover if he is whom I believe him to be Ferruci himself;

and learn if you can what Lydia has to do with all these evil matters. Do this and I am yours. Refuse, and I shall not marry you."

" You set me a hard task," said Lucian with a sigh, " and I hardly know how to set about it."

" Be guided by me," replied Diana. " Go up to London and put an advertisement in the papers offering a reward for the discovery of my father. He is of medium height with grey hair, and has a clean-shaven face with the scar on it—"

" You describe the dead man, Diana."

" But he has not lost a finger," continued Diana as though she had not heard him. " If my father for fear of Lydia is in hiding, he will come to you or me in answer to that advertisement."

" But he must have seen the report of his death by violence in the papers if indeed he is alive," urged Lucian at his wit's end.

" My father is weak in the head, and perhaps was afraid to come out in the midst of such trouble. But if you put in the advertisement that I—his daughter—am in England, he will come to me, for with me he knows he is safe. Also call on Dr. Jorce, and find out the truth about Signor Ferruci."

" And then ?"

" Then when you have done these two things we shall see what will come of them. Promise me to do what I ask you."

" I promise," said Lucian, taking her hand. " But you send me on a wild-goose chase."

" That may be, Lucian ! But my heart — my presentiment—my—instinct—whatever you like to call it—tells me otherwise. Now let us go inside."

" Shall we tell Miss Barbar of our lengagement ?" asked Denzil timidly.

" No ; you will tell no one of that until we learn the truth of this con-

spiracy. When we do, Lucian, you will find that my father is not dead but is alive, and will be at our wedding."

" I doubt it ; I doubt it."

" I am sure of it," answered Diana, and slipping her hand within the arm of her lover she walked with him up to the house. It was the strangest of wooings.

Miss Barbar, with a true woman's interest in love affairs, was inclined to congratulate them both when they entered, deeming—as the chance had had been so propitious—that Lucian had proposed. But Diana looked so stern, and Lucian so gloomy, that she held her peace.

Later on, when her curiosity got the better of her desire not to offend her pupil, she asked if Denzil had spoken.

" Yes," replied Diana, " he has spoken."

" And you have refused him ?" cried the old lady in dismay, for she did not relish the idea that Lucian should have lost by her counsel.

" No ; I have not refused him."

" Then you have said 'yes,' my dear !"

" I have said sufficient," replied Diana cautiously. " Please do not question me any further, Miss Barbar. Lucian and I understand one another very well."

" She calls him by his Christian name," thought the wise old dame, " that is well. She will not speak of her happiness : that is ill," and in various crafty ways Miss Barbar tried to learn how matters actually stood between the pair.

But if she was skilful in asking questions, Diana was equally skilful in baffling them, and Miss Barbar learned nothing more than her pupil chose to tell her, and that was little enough. To perplex her still further Lucian departed for London the next day with a rather disconsolate look on his handsome face, and gave his adviser no very satisfactory explanation at parting.

So Miss Barbar was forced to remain in ignorance of the success or failure of her counsel ; and could by no means discover if the marriage she was so anxious to bring about was likely to take place. And so ended Denzil's visit to Berwin Manor.

In the meantime Lucian went back to London with a heavy heart, for he did not see how he was to set about the task imposed on him by Diana. At first he thought it would be best to advertise as she advised ; but this he considered would do no good, as if Vrain—supposing him to be alive and in hiding—would not come out at the false report of his murder, he certainly would not appear in answer to an advertisement that might be a snare.

Then Lucian wondered if it would be possible to have the grave opened a second time that Diana might truly see if the corpse was that of her father or of another man. But this also was impossible and—to speak plainly—useless, for by this time the body would not be recognisable, therefore it would be of little use to exhume the poor dead man—whomsoever he might be—for the second time. Finally, Lucian judged it would be wisest of all to call on Dr. Jorce, and find out why he was friendly with Ferruci, and how much he knew of the Italian's doings.

While the barrister was making up his mind to this course, he was surprised to receive a visit from no less a person than Mr. Jabez Clyne, the father of Lydia.

The little man, usually so bright and merry, now looked worried and ill at ease. Lucian—so much as he had seen of him—had always liked him better than Lydia, and was sorry to see him so downcast. Nor when he learned the reason was he better pleased. Clyne told it to him in a roundabout way.

"Do you know anything against Signor Ferruci ?" he asked when the first greetings were over.

"Very little ; and that bad," replied Denzil shortly.

"Do you refer to the horrible death of my son-in-law ?"

"Yes I do. Mr. Clyne. I believe Ferruci had a hand in it, and if you bring him here I'll tell him so."

"Can you prove it ?" asked Clyne eagerly.

"No. As yet Ferruci has proved that he was not in Geneva Square on the night of the crime—or rather," added Lucian, correcting himself, "at the hour when the murder was committed."

Clyne's face fell. "I wish you could discover if he is guilty or not," he said. "I am anxious to know the truth."

"Why ?" asked Lucian bluntly.

"Because if he is guilty, I don't want my daughter to marry a murderer."

"What ? Is Mrs. Vrain going to marry him ?"

"Yes," said the little man disconsolately, "and I wish she wasn't."

"So do I—for her own sake. I thought she did not like him—she said as much to me."

"I can't make her out, Mr. Denzil. She grew tired of him for a time, but now she has taken up with him again ; and nothing I can say or do will stop the marriage. I love Lydia beyond words, as she is my only child, and I don't want to see her married to a man of doubtful reputation like Ferruci. So I thought I'd call and see if you could help me."

"I can't," replied Lucian. "As yet I have found out nothing likely to implicate Ferruci in the crime."

"But you may," said Clyne hopefully.

Lucian shrugged his shoulders.

"If I do, you shall know at once," he said.

CHAPTER XXIV

LUCIAN IS SURPRISED

ALTHOUGH Denzil received Mr. Clyne with all courtesy, and promised to aid him, if he could, in breaking off the marriage with Ferruci, by revealing his true character to Mrs. Vrain, he by no means made a confidant of the little man, or entrusted him with the secret of his plans. Clyne, as he well knew, was dominated in every way by his astute daughter, and did he learn Lucian's intentions, he was quite capable—through sheer weakness of character—of revealing the same to Lydia, who in her turn—since she was bent upon marrying Ferruci—might retail them to the Italian, and so put him on his guard.

Denzil therefore rid himself of the American by promising to tell him, on some future occasion, all that he knew about Ferruci. Satisfied with this, Clyne departed in a more cheerful mood, and, apparently, hoped for the best.

After his departure, Lucian again began to consider his idea of calling on Joyce, regarding the alibi of Ferruci. On further reflection he judged that, before paying the visit to Hampstead, it might be judicious to see Rhoda again, and refresh his memory in connection with the events of Christmas Eve. With this idea he put on his hat, and, shortly after the departure of Clyne, walked round to Jersey Street.

On ringing the bell the door was opened by Rhoda in person, looking sharper and more cunning than ever. She informed him that he could not see Mrs. Bensusan, as that good lady was in bed with a cold.

"I don't want to see your mistress, my girl," said Lucian quickly, to stop Rhoda from shutting the door in his face, which she seemed disposed to do. "I desire to speak with you."

"About that there murder?" asked Rhoda sharply; then in reply to the nod of Lucian she continued, "I told you all I knew about it when you called before. I don't know nothing more."

"Can you tell me the name of the dark man you saw in the yard?"

"No, I can't! I know nothing about him."

"Did you ever hear Mr. Wrent mention his name?"

"No, sir! He called and he went, and I saw him in the back yard at 8.30 I never spoke to him, and he never spoke to me."

"Could you swear to the man if you saw him?"

"Yes, I could; have you got him with you?" asked Rhoda eagerly.

"Not at present," answered Lucian, rather surprised by the vindictive expression on the girl's face. "But later on I may call upon you to identify him."

"Do you know who he is?" asked the servant quickly.

"I think so."

"Did he kill that man?"

"Possibly," said Denzil, wondering at these very pointed questions. "Why do you ask?"

"I have my reasons, sir. Where is my cloak?"

"I will return it later on; it will probably be used as evidence."

Rhoda started. "Where?" she demanded with a frown.

"At the trial."

"Do you think they'll hang the person who killed Mr. Vrain?"

"If the police catch him, and his guilt is proved, I am sure they will hang him."

The girl's eyes flashed with a wicked light, and she clasped and unclasped her hands with a quick nervous movement. "I hope they will," she

said in a low rapid voice. "I hope they will."

"What?" cried Lucian with a step forward, "do you know the assassin?"

"No!" cried Rhoda with much vehemence. "I swear I don't, but I think the murderer ought to be hanged. I know—I know—well I know something—see me to-morrow night and you'll hear."

"Hear what?"

"The truth," said this strange girl, and shut the door before Lucian could say another word.

The barrister, quite dumbfounded, remained on the step looking at the closed door. So important were Rhoda's words that he was on the point of ringing again, to interview her once more and force her to speak. But when he reflected that Mrs. Bensusan was in bed, and that Rhoda alone could re-open the door—which from her late action it was pretty evident she would not do—he decided to retire for the present. It was little use to call in the police, or create trouble by forcing his way into the house, as that might induce Rhoda to run away before giving her evidence. So Lucian departed with the intention of keeping the next night's appointment, and hearing what Rhoda had to say.

"The truth," he repeated as he walked along the street; "evidently she knows who killed this man. If so, why did she not speak before; and why is she so vindictive? Heavens! if Diana's belief should be a true one and her father not dead? Conspiracy! murder! this gipsy girl, that subtle Italian, and the mysterious Wrent. My head is in a whirl. I cannot understand what it all means. To-morrow when Rhoda speaks I may. But—can I trust her? I doubt it. Still there is nothing else for it. I *must* trust her."

Talking to himself in this incoherent way, Lucian reached his rooms and tried to quieten the excitement of his brain caused by the strange words of

Rhoda. It was yet early in the afternoon, so he took up a book and threw himself on the sofa to read for an hour, but he found it quite impossible to fix his attention on the page. The case in which he was concerned was far more exciting than any invention of the brain, and after a vain attempt to banish it from his mind he jumped up and threw the book aside.

Although he did not know it, Lucian was suffering from a sharp attack of detective fever, and the only means of curing such a disease is to learn the secret which haunts the imagination. Rhoda, as she stated—rather ambiguously it must be confessed—could reveal this especial secret touching the murder of Vrain; but, for some hidden reason, chose to delay her confession for twenty-four hours. Lucian, all on fire with curiosity, found himself unable to bear this suspense, so to distract his mind and learn, if possible, the true relationship existing between Ferruci and Jorce, he set out for Hampstead to interview the doctor.

"The Haven," as Jorce with some humour termed his private asylum, was a red brick house, large, handsome and commodious, built in a wooded and secluded part of Hampstead. It was surrounded by a high brick wall, over which the trees of its park could be seen; and possessed a pair of elaborate iron gates, opening on to a quiet country lane. Externally it looked merely the estate of a gentleman.

The grounds were large, and well laid out in flower gardens and orchards, and as it was Dr. Jorce's system to allow his least crazy patients as much liberty as was possible, they roamed at will round the grounds, giving the place a cheerful and populated look. The more violent inmates were, of course, secluded; but these were well and kindly treated by the doctor. Indeed, Jorce was a very humane man and had a theory that more cures of the unhappy beings

under his charge could be effected by kindness than by severity.

His asylum was more like a private hotel with paying guests than an establishment for the retention of the insane, and even to an outside observer the eccentricities of the doctor's family—as he loved to call them—were not more marked than many of the oddities possessed by people at large. Indeed, Jorce was in the habit of saying that, "There were more mad people in the world than were kept under lock and key," and in this he was doubtless right. However, the kindly and judicious little man was like a father to those under his charge, and very popular with them all. Anything more unlike the popular conception of an asylum than the establishment at Hampstead can scarcely be imagined.

When Lucian arrived at "The Haven" he found that Jorce had long since returned from his holiday, and was that day at home; so on sending in his card he was at once admitted into the presence of the local potentate. Jorce, looking smaller and more like a fairy changeling than ever, was evidently pleased to see Lucian, but a look on his dry, yellow face indicated that he was somewhat puzzled to account for the visit. However, preliminary greetings having passed, Lucian did not leave him long in doubt.

"Dr. Jorce," he said boldly and without preamble, "I have called to see you about that alibi of Signor Ferruci's."

"Alibi is a nasty word, Mr. Denzil," said Jorce, looking sharply at his visitor.

"Perhaps! but it is the only word that can be used with propriety."

"But I thought that I was called on to decide a bet."

"Oh! that was Count Ferruci's clever way of putting it," responded Lucian with a sneer. "He did not wish you to know too much about his business."

"H'm! Perhaps I know more than you think, Mr. Denzil."

"What do you mean, sir?" cried Lucian sharply.

"Softly, Mr. Denzil, softly," rejoined the doctor, waving his hand. "I shall explain everything to your satisfaction. Do you know why I went to Italy?"

"No, no more than I know why you went with Signor Ferruci," replied Lucian, recalling Link's communication.

"Ah!" said Jorce placidly, "you have been making inquiries, I see. But you are wrong in one particular. I did not go to Italy with Ferruci; I left him in Paris, and I went on myself to Florence to find out the true character of the man."

"Why did you wish to do that, doctor?"

"Because I had some business with our mutual friend the Count, and I was not altogether pleased with the way in which it was conducted. Also, my last interview with you about that bet made me suspicious of the man. Over in Florence I learned sufficient about the Count to assure me that he is a bad man, with whom it is as well to have as little to do as possible. I intended to return at once with this information and to call on you, Mr. Denzil. Unfortunately I fell ill of an attack of typhoid fever in Florence, and had to stay there these two months."

"I am sorry," said Lucian, noting that the doctor did look ill, "but why did you not send on your information to me?"

"It was necessary to see you personally, Mr. Denzil. I arrived back a few days ago, and intended writing to you when I recovered from the fatigue of the journey. However, your arrival saves me the trouble. Now I can tell you all about Ferruci if you like."

"Then tell me, Doctor, if you spoke truly about that alibi?"

"Yes, I did. Count Ferruci was

with me on that night, and stayed here until the next morning."

"What time did he arrive?"

"About ten o'clock; or, to be precise," said Jorce, "about ten-thirty."

"Ah!" cried Lucian exultingly, "then Ferruci must have been the man in the back yard."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Jorce in a puzzled tone.

"Why! that Count Ferruci has had to do with a crime committed some months ago in Pimlico. A man called Mark Vrain was murdered, as you may have seen in the papers, Doctor, and, I believe, Ferruci murdered him."

"If I remember rightly," said Jorce with calmness, "the man in question was murdered shortly before midnight on Christmas Eve. If that is so, Ferruci could not have killed him, because, as I said before, he was here at half-past ten on that night."

"I don't say he actually killed the man," explained Lucian eagerly, "but he certainly employed some one to strike the blow, else what was he doing in the Jersey Street yard on that night? You can say what you like, Dr. Jorce, but that man is guilty of Mark Vrain's death."

"No," replied Jorce coolly, "he's not, for the simple reason that Vrain is not dead."

"Not dead?" repeated Lucian, recalling Diana's belief.

"No! For the last few months Mark Vrain, under the name of Michael Clear, has been in this asylum."

CHAPTER XXV

A DARK PLOT

"So Vrain is alive after all," was Lucian's comment on the speech of Jorce, "and he is here under your charge? Jove! it's wonderful. Diana was right after all."

"Diana! who is Diana?" queried Jorce; then held up his hand to stop his visitor from replying. "Wait! I know. Vrain mentioned his daughter Diana."

"Yes! she is the daughter of Vrain, and she believes her father to be alive."

"On what grounds?"

"Because the dead man, whom, until lately, she believed to be Mr. Vrain, had one of his little fingers missing. That fact came to her knowledge only a week ago. When it did, she declared that the deceased could not be her father."

"H'm!" said Jorce thoughtfully, "I am quite in the dark as to why Mr. Vrain was put under my charge."

"Because Ferruci wished to marry his widow."

"I see! Ferruci substituted another man for my patient and had him killed."

"Evidently!" replied Lucian, "but I am almost as much in the dark as you are, Mr. Jorce. Tell me how Vrain came to be placed here; and, exchanging confidence for confidence, I'll let you know all I have discovered since the death of the man in Geneva Square who called himself Berwin."

"That is a fair offer," replied Jorce, clearing his throat, "and one which I willingly accept. I do not wish you to think that I am in league with Signor Ferruci. What I did was done

honestly. I am not afraid of telling my story."

"I am sure of that," said Lucian heartily. "I guessed that Ferruci had not trusted you altogether, from the time he feigned that your evidence was needed only to decide a bet."

"Trust me," echoed Jorce with scorn, "he never trusted me at all; he is too cunning for that. However, you shall hear."

"I'm all attention, Doctor."

"A week before last Christmas, Signor Ferruci called to see me and explained that he was interested in a gentleman called Michael Clear whom he had met some years before in Italy. Clear, he said, had been most intimate with him, but later on had indulged so much in the morphia habit, that their friendship had terminated with high words. Afterwards Clear had returned to England and Ferruci lost sight of him for some months. Then he visited England, and one day found Clear in the street looking ill and wretched. The man had become a confirmed morphiamaniac, and the habit had weakened his brain. The Count pitied the poor creature, according to his own story, and took him to his home, the whereabouts of which Clear was happily able to remember."

"Where is the house?" asked Lucian, taking out his pocket-book.

"Number 30, St. Bertha's Road, Bayswater," replied Jorce; and when the barrister for his private information had made a note of the address, he continued: "It then appeared that Clear was married. The wife told Ferruci that she was afraid of her husband, who, in his fits of drink—for he drank likewise—often threatened to kill her. They had lost their money, and the poor woman was at her wit's end what to do. Ferruci explained to me that out of friendship he was most anxious to befriend Clear, and stated that Mrs. Clear wished to get her husband cured. He

proposed, therefore, to put Clear into my asylum, and pay on behalf of the wife."

"A very ingenious and plausible plan," said Lucian. "Well, Doctor, and what did you say?"

"I agreed, of course; provided the man was certified insane in the usual way. Ferruci then departed promising to bring Mrs. Clear to see me. He brought her late on Christmas Eve at ten—"

"Ah!" interrupted Lucian, "did she wear a black gauze veil with velvet spots?"

"She did, Mr. Denzil. Have you met her?"

"No! but I have heard of her. She was the woman who visited Wrent in Jersey Street. No doubt Ferruci was waiting for her in the back yard."

"Who is Wrent?" asked Jorce, looking puzzled.

"Don't you know the name, Doctor?"

"No!"

"Did Mrs. Clear never mention it?"

"Never!"

"Nor Ferruci?"

"No! I never heard the name before," replied Jorce complacently.

"Strange!" said Denzil reflectively. "Yet Wrent seems to be at the bottom of the whole plot. Well, never mind just now. Please continue, my dear Doctor. What did Mrs. Clear say?"

"Oh, she repeated Ferruci's story, amplified in a feminine fashion. She was afraid of Michael, who, when excited with morphia or drink, would snatch up a knife to attempt her life. Twice she had disarmed him, and now she was tired and frightened. She was willing for him to go into my asylum since Count Ferruci had so kindly consented to bear the expense, but she wished to give him one more chance. Then, as it was late, she stayed here all night. So did the Count, and on Christmas Day they went away."

"When did they come back?"

"About a fortnight later, and they brought with them the man they both called Michael Clear."

"What is he like?"

"An old man with a white beard."

"Is he mad?" asked Lucian bluntly.

"He is not mad now; only weak in the head," replied Jorce professionally, "but he was certainly mad when he arrived. The man's brain is wrecked by morphia."

"Not by drink?"

"No; although it suited Mrs. Clear and Ferruci to say so. But Clear—as I may call him—was very violent, and quite justified Mrs. Clear's desire to sequester him. She told me that he often imagined himself to be other people. Sometimes he would feign to be Napoleon: again the Pope; so when he—a week after he was in the asylum—insisted that he was Mark Vrain, I put it down to his delusion."

"But how could you think he had come by the name, Doctor?"

"My dear sir, at that time the papers were full of the case and its mystery; and as we have a reading-room in this asylum, I fancied that Clear had seen the accounts and had—as a delusion—called himself Vrain. Afterwards he fell into a kind of comatose state, and for weeks said very little. He was most abject and frightened, and responded in a timid sort of way to the name of Clear. Naturally this confirmed me in my belief that his calling himself Vrain was a delusion. Then he grew better, and one day told me that his name was Vrain. Of course, I did not believe him. Still he was so persistent about the matter, that I thought there might be something in it, and I spoke to Ferruci."

"What did he say?"

"He denied that the man's name was anything but Clear. That the wife and two doctors—for the poor soul had been duly certified as insane—had put him into the asylum; and altogether persisted so strongly in his original story that I thought it was

absurd to put a crazy man's delusion against a sane man's tale. Besides, everything regarding the certificate and sequestering of Clear had been quite legal. Two doctors—and very rightly too—had certified to the insanity of the man; and his wife—as I then believed Mrs. Clear to be—had consented to his detention."

"What made you suspicious that there might be something wrong?" asked Lucian eagerly.

"My visit to meet you at Ferruci's request to prove the alibi," responded Jorce. "I thought it was strange, and afterwards when a detective named Mr. Link called, I thought it was stranger still."

"But you did not see Link?"

"No. I was in Italy then, but I heard of his visit. In Florence I heard from a most accomplished gossip the whole story of Mr. Vrain's marriage and the prior engagement of Mrs. Vrain to Ferruci. I guessed that there might be some plot, but I could not quite understand how it was carried out, save that Vrain—as I then began to believe Clear to be—had been placed in my asylum under a false name. On my return I intended to see you, when I was laid up in Florence with the fever. Now however that we have met, tell me so much of the story as you know. Afterwards we shall see Mr. Vrain."

Lucian was willing enough to show his confidence in Jorce, the more so as he needed his help. Forthwith he told him all he knew from the time he had met Michael Clear, *alias* Mark Berwin, *alias* Mark Vrain, in Geneva Square, down to the moment he had presented himself for information at the gates of the "Haven." Doctor Jorce listened with the greatest attention, his little face puckered up into a grim smile; and shook his head when the barrister ended his recital.

"A bad world, Mr. Denzil, a bad world," he said rising. "Come with me and I'll take you to see my patient."

"But what do you think of it all?" said Denzil, eager for some comment.

"I'll tell you that," rejoined Jorce, "when you have heard the story of Mr. Vrain."

In a few minutes Lucian was led by his guide into a pleasant room with French windows opening on to a wide verandah, and a sunny lawn set round with flowers. Books were arranged in shelves round the walls; newspapers and magazines were on the table; and near the window in a comfortable chair sat an old man with a volume in his hand. As Jorce entered he stood up and shuffled forward with a senile smile of delight. Evidently—and with reason, poor soul—he considered the doctor his very good friend.

"Well! well!" said the cheery Jorce, "and how are you to-day, Mr. Vrain?"

"I feel very well!" replied Vrain in a soft weak voice; "who is this, Doctor?"

"A young friend of mine, Mr. Vrain. He wishes to hear your story."

"Alas! alas!" sighed Vrain, his eyes filling with tears, "a sad story, sir."

The father of Diana was of middle height with white hair, and a long white beard which swept his chest. On his cheek Lucian saw the cicatrice of which Diana had spoken, and mainly by which the dead man had been falsely identified as Vrain. He was very like Clear in figure and manner; but of course the resemblance in the face was not very close, as Clear had been clean shaven whereas the real Vrain wore a beard. The eyes were dim and weak looking, and altogether Lucian saw that Vrain was not fitted to battle with the world in any way, and quite weak enough to become the prey of villains, as had been his sad fate.

"My name is Mark Vrain, young sir," said he, beginning his story without further preamble. "I lived in

Berwin Manor, Bath, with my wife Lydia, but she treated me badly by letting another man love her and I left her. Oh, yes, sir, I left her. I went away to Salisbury and was very happy there with my books; but, alas! I took morph—"

"Vrain!" said Jorce holding up his finger, "no!"

"Of course, of course," said the old man with a watery smile, "I mean I was very happy there. But Signor Ferruci, a black-hearted villain"—his face grew dark as he mentioned the name—"found me out and made me come with him to London. He kept me there for months, and then he brought me here."

"Kept you where?" Mr. Vrain, asked Lucian gently.

The old man looked at him with a vacant eye. "I don't know," he said in a dull voice.

"You came here from Bayswater," hinted Jorce.

"Yes, yes; Bayswater," cried Vrain, growing excited. "I was there with a woman they called my wife. She was not my wife! My wife is fair: this woman was dark. Her name was Maud Clear: my wife's name is Lydia."

"Did Mrs. Clear say you were her husband, Michael?"

"Yes! She called me Michael Clear, and brought me to stay with the doctor. But I am not Michael Clear."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE OTHER MAN'S WIFE

As soon as Lucian arrived back in his rooms he sat down at his desk and wrote a long letter to Diana giving a full account of his extraordinary discovery of her father in Jorce's asylum, and advising her to come up at once to London.

When he posted this—which he did the same night—he sighed to think it was not a love letter. He could have covered reams of paper with words of passion and adoration ; he could have poured out his whole soul at the feet of his divinity telling her of his love, his aspirations, his hopes and fears. No doubt from a common-sense view the letter would have been silly enough, but it would have relieved his mind and completed his happiness of knowing that he loved and was beloved.

But in place of writing thus, he was compelled by his promise to Diana to pen a description of his late discovery, and interesting as the case was now growing, he found it irksome to detail the incident of the afternoon. He wished to be a lover, not a detective.

So absent-minded and distraught was Lucian, that Miss Greeb, who had long suspected something was wrong with him, spoke that very evening about himself. She declared that Lucian was working too hard, that he needed another rest, although he had just returned from the country ; and recommended a sleeping draught. Finally she produced a letter which had just arrived, and, as it was in a female hand, Miss Greeb watched its effect on her admired lodger with the

keen eyes of a jealous woman. When she saw him flush and seize it eagerly, casting meanwhile an impatient look on her to leave the room, she knew the truth at once, and retired hurriedly to the kitchen, where she shed floods of tears.

"I might have guessed it," gasped Miss Greeb to a comfortable cat which lay selfishly before the fire ; "he's far too good looking not to be snapped up. He'll be leaving me and setting up house with that other woman. I only hope she'll do for him as well as I have done. I wonder if she's beautiful and rich. Oh, how dreadful it all is." But the cat made no comment on this tearful address—not as much as a mew. It rolled over into a warmer place and went to sleep again. Cats are particularly selfish animals.

Two days afterwards Miss Greeb opened the door to a tall and beautiful lady, who asked for Mr. Denzil, and was shown into his sitting-room. With keen instinct Miss Greeb decided that this was the woman who had taken possession of Lucian's heart, and being a just little creature, in spite of her jealousy, was obliged to admit that the visitor was as handsome as a picture. Then, seeing that there was no chance for her beside this splendid lady, she consoled herself with a dismal little proverb and looked forward to the time when it would be necessary to put a ticket in the parlour window. Meanwhile, to have someone on whose bosom she could weep, Miss Greeb went round to see Mrs. Bensusan ; leaving Diana in possession of Lucian, and the cat sole occupant of the kitchen.

In the drawing-room on the front floor, Diana, with her eyes shining like two stars, was talking to Lucian. She had come up at once on receipt of his letter ; she had been to Hampstead, she had seen her father, and now she was telling Lucian about the visit.

"He knew me at once, poor dear," she said rapidly, "and asked me if I had been out, just as if I'd left the

house for a visit and come back. "Ah" —she shook her head and sighed—"I am afraid he'll never be quite himself again."

"What does Jorce think?"

"He says that father can be discharged as cured and is going to see about it for me. Of course, he will never be quite sane, but he will never be violent so long as morphia and drugs of that sort are kept from him. As soon as he is discharged I shall take him back to Bath and put him in charge of Miss Barbar, then I shall return to town and we must expose the whole conspiracy."

"Conspiracy?"

"What else do you call it, Lucian? That woman and Ferruci have planned and carried it out between them. They put my father into the asylum, and made another man pass as him, in order to get the assurance money. As their tool did not die quickly enough they killed him."

"No, Diana. Both Lydia and Ferruci have proved beyond all doubt that they were not in Pimlico at the hour of the death. I believe they contrived this conspiracy, but I don't believe they murdered Clear."

"Well, we shall see what defence they make. But one thing is certain, Lucian, Lydia will have to disgorge the assurance money."

"Yes, she certainly will! and I've no doubt the Assurance Company will prosecute her for fraud in obtaining it. I shall see Ferruci to-morrow and force him to confess his putting your father in the asylum."

"No!" said Diana, shaking her head, "don't do that until you have more evidence against him."

"I think the evidence of Jorce is strong enough. I suppose you mean the evidence of Mrs. Clear?"

"Yes; although for her own sake I don't suppose she will speak."

Lucian nodded. "I thought of that also," he said, "and yesterday I went to St. Bertha Street, Bayswater, to see her. But I found that she had moved,

and no one knew where she was. I expect, having received her price for the conspiracy, she has left London. However, I put an advertisement in the papers, saying if she called on me here, she would hear of something to her advantage. It is in the papers this morning."

"I doubt if she will call," said Diana seriously; "what about the promised revelation of Rhoda?"

"I believe that girl is deceiving me," cried Lucian angrily. "I went round to Jersey Street, as she asked me, and only saw Mrs. Bensusan, who said that Rhoda was out and would not be back for some time. Then I had to wait you here and tell you all about your father, so the thing slipped my memory. I have not been near the place since, but I'll go round there tonight. Whatever is Miss Greeb thinking of?" cried Lucian, breaking off quickly, "that front door bell has been ringing for at least five minutes."

To Diana's amusement Lucian went and shouted down the stairs to Miss Greeb; but as no reply came, and the bell was still ringing furiously, he was obliged to open the door himself. On the step there stood a little woman in a tailor-made brown frock, a plainly trimmed brown straw hat with a black gauze velvet-spotted veil. At once Denzil guessed who she was.

"You are Mrs. Clear?" he said, delighted that she had replied so quickly to his advertisement, for it had only that morning appeared in the newspapers.

"Yes, I am," answered the woman in a quick, sharp voice; "are you the L. D. who advertised for me?"

"Yes; come upstairs. I have much to say to you."

For a moment Mrs. Clear stood irresolutely on the doorstep. Her veil was still down, and Lucian could not see the expression of her face. However, he guessed that she was nervous, and waited, smiling, for the timidity to pass. Finally Mrs. Clear entered and followed him up the stairs.

"Diana," said Lucian on entering the room with his prize, "let me introduce you to Mrs. Clear."

"Mrs. Clear!" cried Diana, making a hasty step forward, "are you the wife of the man who was murdered in the house opposite?"

Mrs. Clear uttered a cry of astonishment and turned as if to retreat. But Denzil was between her and the door, so she saw that there was nothing for it but to outface the situation. As though she found it difficult to breathe she threw up her veil, and Diana beheld a thin white face with two brilliant black eyes. They looked angry enough at the present moment.

"This is a trap," said Mrs. Clear in a hoarse voice, looking from the one to the other, "who are you?"

"I," said Lucian politely, "I am the man who met your husband before—"

"My husband! I have my husband in an asylum. You can't have met him."

"You are telling a falsehood," said Diana fiercely; "the gentleman in the asylum of Dr. Jorce is not your husband, but my father."

"Your father?" echoed the woman insolently, "and who are you?"

"I am Diana Vrain!"

Mrs. Clear gave a screech and dropped back on to the sofa, staring at Diana with wide-open and terrified eyes. As she did not seem disposed to speak Lucian carried on the conversation.

"And now, Mrs. Clear, I see you realise the situation," he said coldly. "You must confess your share in this conspiracy."

"What conspiracy?" she interrupted furiously.

"The putting of Mr. Vrain into an asylum, and the passing off of your husband, Michael Clear, as him."

"I don't know anything about it!" said Mrs. Clear defiantly.

"Come now," said Lucian sternly, "you talk nonsense. If you refuse to speak I'll have you arrested at once."

"Arrest me!" She bounded off the sofa with flashing eyes.

"Yes; on a charge of conspiracy. It is no use your getting angry, Mrs. Clear, for it won't improve your position. We—that is, this lady and myself—wish to know: Firstly, how your husband came to be masquerading as Mr. Vrain; secondly, where we can find the man called Wrent who employed your husband; and thirdly, Mrs. Clear, we wish to know, and the law wishes to know, who killed your husband?"

"I don't know who killed him," said the woman, looking rather afraid, "but I believe Wrent did."

"Who is Wrent?"

"I don't know!"

"You don't know many things," said Diana, taking part in the conversation, "but you must tell us what you do know, otherwise I shall call in a policeman and have you arrested."

"You can't prove anything against me," said Mrs. Clear sulkily.

"I think I can," said Lucian in the most cheerful manner. "I can prove that you were in No. 13 of this Square seeing your husband, for I found on the fence dividing the back yard of that house from one in Jersey Street a scrap of a veil such as you wear. Also the landlady and servant can prove that you called on Mr. Wrent several times, and were with him on the night of the murder. Then there is the evidence of your cloak which you left behind, and which Wrent gave to the servant Rhoda. Also the evidence of Signor Ferruci—"

"Ferruci!" snapped Mrs. Clear now quite pale; "what has he said about me?"

Lucian saw that revenge might make the woman speak, so he lied in the calmest manner to get at the truth. "Ferruci says that he contrived the whole conspiracy."

"So he did," said Mrs. Clear with a nod.

"And took you to 'The Haven' at Hampstead on Christmas Eve."

"That's true; he took me from Wrent's house in Jersey Street. You need not go on, Mr. L. D.," said Mrs. Clear calmly, "I admit the whole business."

"You do?" cried Lucian and Diana together.

"Yes! if only to spite that old villain Wrent, who has not paid me the money he promised."

Before Lucian and Miss Vrain could express their pleasure at Mrs. Clear coming to this sensible conclusion the door opened suddenly, and little Miss Greeb in a wonderful state of agitation tripped in.

"Oh, Mr. Denzil!" she cried, taking no notice of the two women, "I've just been to Mrs. Bensusan's, and Rhoda's run away."

"Run away!"

"Yes! she hasn't been back all day, and left a note for Mrs. Bensusan saying she was going to hide, because she was afraid."

thing—what she did not explain in the note she left behind her; and it was necessary that she should be discovered and forced into confessing what she knew of the conspiracy and murder. Mrs. Clear, not having been paid her hush-money, had betrayed the confidence and misdeeds of Ferruci, thereby revealing an extent of villainy for which neither Diana nor Lucian was prepared. Now the Count had to be seen and brought to book for his doings, Lydia informed that her husband was in the asylum, and Vrain himself had to be released in due form from his legal imprisonment. How Lucian, even with the assistance of Diana, could deal with all these matters he did not know.

"Why not see Mr. Link?" suggested Diana, when Mrs. Clear had departed after making a clean breast of the nefarious transactions in which she had been involved, "he may take the case in hand again."

"No doubt," responded Denzil drily, "but I am not very keen to hand it over to him, seeing that he has abandoned it twice. Again, if I call in the police, it is all over with Lydia and the Count. They will be arrested and punished."

"For the murder of Clear?"

"Perhaps! if it can be proved that they have anything to do with it; certainly for the conspiracy to get the assurance money by the feigned death of your father."

"Well," said Diana coldly, "and why should they not receive the reward of their deeds?"

"Quite so; but the question is, do you wish any scandal?"

Diana was silent: she had not looked at the matter from this point of view. It was true what Lucian said. If the police took up the case again, Lydia and her accomplice would be arrested, and the whole sordid story of their doings would be in the papers.

Diana was a proud woman, and winced at the idea of such publicity.

CHAPTER XXVII

A CONFESSION

Now, indeed, Lucian had his hands full. Rhoda, the red-headed servant of Mrs. Bensusan, had run away on the plea that she was afraid of some-

It would be as well to avoid proceeding to such extremities. If the assurance money was returned by Lydia, she would be reduced to her former estate, and by timely flight might escape the vengeance of the defrauded company. After all, she was the wife of Vrain, and little as Diana liked her, she did not wish to see the woman who was so closely related to the wronged man put in prison; not for her own sake, but for the sake of the name she so unworthily bore.

"I leave it in your hands," said Diana to Lucian, who was watching her closely.

"Very good," replied Denzil; "then I think it will be best for me to see Ferruci first and hear his confession; afterwards call on Mrs. Vrain and learn what she has to say. Then—"

"Well," said Diana curiously, "what then?"

"I will be guided by circumstances. In the meantime, for the sake of your name, we had better keep the matter as quiet as possible."

"Mrs. Clear may speak out."

"Mrs. Clear won't speak," said Denzil grimly. "She will keep quiet for her own sake; and as Rhoda has left Jersey Street, there will be no danger of trouble from that quarter. First I'll see Lydia and the Count to get to the bottom of this conspiracy; then I'll set the police on Rhoda's track, that she may be arrested and made to confess her knowledge of the murder."

"Do you think she knows anything?"

"I think she knows everything," replied Lucian with emphasis; "that is why she has run away. If we capture her, and force her to speak, we may be able to arrest Wrent."

"Why Wrent?" asked Diana.

"Have you forgotten what Mrs. Clear said. I agree with her that he is the assassin, although we can't prove it as yet."

"But who is Wrent?"

"Ah!" said Lucian significantly, "that is just what I wish to find out."

The upshot of this interview was that early the next morning Denzil went to the chambers of Ferruci in Marquis Street, and informed the servant that he wanted particularly to see the Count.

At first the Italian, being still in bed—for he was a late riser—did not incline to grant his visitor an interview; but on second thoughts he ordered Lucian to be shown into the sitting-room, and shortly afterwards joined him there wrapped in a dressing gown. He welcomed the barrister with a smiling nod, and having some instinct that Lucian came on an unpleasant errand he did not offer him his hand. From the first the two men were on their guard against one another.

"Good morning, sir," said Ferruci in his best English; "may I ask why you take me from bed so early?"

"To tell you a story."

"About my friend Dr. Jorce saying I was with him on that night?" sneered the Count.

"Partly, and partly about a lady you know."

Ferruci frowned. "You speak of Mrs. Vrain?"

"No," replied Lucian coolly. "I speak of Mrs. Clear."

At the mention of this name, which was the last one he expected to hear his visitor pronounce, the Italian—in spite of his coolness and cunning—could not forbear a start.

"Mrs. Clear?" he repeated, "and what you know of Mrs. Clear?"

"As much as Dr. Jorce could tell me, Count."

Ferruci's brow cleared. "Then you know I pay for keeping her miserable husband with my friend," he said composedly; "it is for her sake I am so kind."

"Rather it is for your own you are so cunning."

"Cunning! a most strange word for my goodness," said the Count coolly.

"The most fit word, you mean," replied Lucian impatient of this fencing. "It is no use beating about the bush, Count, I know that the man you keep in the asylum is not Clear but Mark Vrain."

"La! la! la! You talk great humbug. Mr. Vrain is dead and buried."

"He is not dead," answered Lucian resolutely, "and the man who was buried under his name is Michael Clear, the husband of the woman who told me all."

Ferruci, who had been pacing impatiently up and down the room, stopped short with a nervous laugh.

"This is most amusing," he said with an emotion he could not conceal despite his self-control. "Mrs. Clear told you all? Eh? She told you what, my friend?"

"That is the story I have come to tell you," replied Lucian sharply.

"Very good!" said Ferruci with a shrug. "I wait to hear this pretty story," and with a frown he threw himself into a chair near Lucian. Apparently he saw that he was found out, for it took him all his time to keep his voice from trembling and his hands from shaking. The man was not a coward, but being thus brought face to face with a peril he little expected, it was scarcely to be wondered at that he felt shaken and nervous. Moreover, he knew little about the English law, and hardly guessed how his misdeeds would be punished. Still he did not surrender on the spot, but listened quietly to Lucian's story in the hope of seeing some way of escape from his awkward position.

"The other day I went to Dr. Jorce's asylum," said Lucian slowly, "and there I discovered—it matters not how—that your friend Clear was Mr. Vrain; also I learned that he had been placed in the asylum by you and Mrs.

Clear. Jorce gave me her address in Bayswater, but when I went there I could not find her; she had left. I then put an advertisement in all the papers stating that if she called on me she would hear of something to her advantage. Now, Count, it appears that Mrs. Clear was in the habit of looking into the papers to see if there was any message from yourself, or your friend Wrent, so she saw my advertisement at once, and came in person to reply to it."

"One moment, Mr. Denzil," said Ferruci politely. "I know no one called Wrent, and he is not my friend."

"We'll come to that hereafter," answered Lucian, with a shrug. "In the meantime I'll proceed with my story, which I see interests you very much. Well, Count, it seems that Michael Clear was an actor, who bore a strong resemblance to Mr. Vrain, save that he had not a scar on his face. Vrain, at Bath, was always clean-shaven, now he wears a long white beard, but that is neither here nor there. Clear had a moustache, but when that was shaved off he looked exactly like Vrain. For purposes of your own, which you can easily guess, you made the acquaintance of this man, a profligate and a drunkard, and proposed, for a certain sum of money to be paid to his wife, that he, Michael Clear, should personate Vrain and live in the Silent House in Geneva Square under the name of Berwin. You knew that Clear was slowly dying of consumption and drink, so you trusted that he would die as Vrain; that Mrs. Vrain—who I believe is in the plot—would recognise the corpse by the description in the newspapers; and that, when Clear was buried as Vrain, she would get the assurance money and marry you."

"That is clever," said the Count with a sneer. "But is it true?"

"You know best," answered Lucian coolly. "However, all turned out as you expected, for Clear died as Vrain—

or rather was murdered at your command, as he did not die quickly enough—his body was recognised by Mrs. Vrain, buried as her husband, and she got the assurance money. The only thing that remains for your conspiracy to be entirely successful is that Mrs. Vrain should marry you; and—as I was told by Mr. Clyne—that has pretty well been arranged."

"Do you think, then, that Clyne would let his daughter marry a man who has done all this?" said Ferruci, who was now very pale.

"I don't believe Clyne knows anything about it," replied Lucian coldly. "You and Mrs. Vrain made up this pretty plot between you. Vrain himself told me how you decoyed him from Salisbury, and took him to Mrs. Clear's in Bayswater, where he passed as her husband, although, as she confesses, she kept him as a kind of prisoner."

"But this is wrong," cried Ferruci, trying to laugh, "this is most foolish. How would a man, of his own will, pass as the husband of a woman he knew not?"

"A sane man would not; but none knew better than you, Count, that Vrain was not sane, and that you dosed him with drugs, and let Mrs. Clear keep him locked up in her house until you put him in the asylum. Vrain was a puppet in your hands, and you locked him up in an asylum a fortnight after the man who personated him was murdered. You intended to marry Mrs. Vrain and keep her wretched husband in that asylum all his life."

"The best place for a lunatic," said Ferruci.

"Ah!" cried Lucian. "Then you admit that Vrain was mad?"

"I admit nothing, not even that he is alive. If what you say is true," said the Italian cunningly, "how came it that the murdered man had the scar on his cheek? He might have been like Vrain, eh! but not so much."

"Mrs. Clear explained that," replied Lucian quickly. "You made that scar, Count, with vitriol or some such stuff. You don't know chemistry for nothing, I see."

"I am quite ignorant of chemistry," said Ferruci sullenly.

"Jorce heard a different story in Florence."

"In Florence? Did Jorce ask about me there?" said the Count, in alarm.

"He did, and heard some strange tales, Count. Come, now, it is no use your trying to evade this matter further. Jorce can prove that you put Vrain into his asylum under the name of Clear. Miss Vrain can prove that the so-called Clear is her father, and Mrs. Clear—who has turned Queen's evidence—has exposed the whole of your conspiracy. The game's up, Count."

Ferruci sprang from his seat and began to walk hastily up and down the room. He looked haggard and pale, and years older as he recognised his position, for he saw very plainly that he was trapped, and that nothing remained to him but flight. But how to fly? He stopped opposite to Lucian.

"What do you intend to do?" he demanded in a hoarse voice.

"Have you arrested along with Mrs. Vrain," replied Lucian, making this threat to force Ferruci into defending himself or confessing.

"Mrs. Vrain is innocent; she knows nothing about this conspiracy, as you call it. I planned the whole thing myself."

"You admit then, that the so-called Vrain was really Michael Clear?"

"Yes. I got him to personate the man Vrain so that I could get the assurance money when I married Lydia. I chose Clear because he was like Vrain. I made the scar on the cheek, and I thought he would die soon, being consumptive."

"And you killed him?"

"No! No! I swear I did not kill him."

"Did you not take that stiletto from Berwin Manor?"

"No! I never did. I am telling the truth! I do not know who killed Clear."

"Did you not visit Wrent in Jersey Street?"

"Yes! I was the man Rhoda saw in the back yard. I was waiting for Mrs. Clear to take her to Hampstead; and in the meantime I thought I would climb over the fence and see Clear. But the girl saw me, so I ran away and joined Mrs. Clear up the road. I was not aware at the time that the woman who saw me was Rhoda. Afterwards I went to Hampstead with Mrs. Clear to see Jorce."

"Did you buy the cloak?"

"I did! That girl in Baxter & Co.'s. told a lie for me. I was warned by Mrs. Vrain that you had made questions about the cloak, so I went to the girl and told her you were a jealous husband, and paid her to say it was not I who bought the cloak. She did so, quite ignorant of the real reason I wished her to deny knowing me."

"Why did you buy the cloak?" said Lucian, satisfied with this explanation.

"I bought it for Wrent; he asked me to buy it; but what he wanted it for I do not know. He had it some days before Christmas, and, I believe, gave it to Mrs. Clear, and afterwards to the girl Rhoda. But of this I am not sure."

"Who is Wrent?" asked Denzil, reserving the most important question for the last.

"Wrent?" said Ferruci, smiling in a sneering way. "Ah, you wish to know who Wrent is? Well; excuse me for a few minutes and I'll bring you something to show who he is."

With a nod to Lucian he passed into his bedroom, leaving the barrister

much astonished. He thought that Ferruci was Wrent himself, and had gone away to resume the disguise of wig and beard. While he pondered thus the Count reappeared, carrying a small bottle in his hand.

"Mr. Denzil," said he with a ghastly smile, "I have played a bold game, and, thanks to a woman's treachery, I have lost. I hoped to get twenty thousand pounds and a charming wife; but I have gained nothing but poverty and a chance of imprisonment; but I am of noble birth, and I will not survive my dishonour. You wish to know who Wrent is—you shall never know."

He raised the bottle to his lips before Lucian, motionless with horror, could rush forward, and the next moment Count Ercole Ferruci was lying dead on the floor.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE NAME OF THE ASSASSIN

THAT afternoon London was ringing with the news of Ferruci's suicide; but no paper could give any reason for the rash act. This inability was due to the police, who, anxious to capture those concerned in the conspiracy to obtain the assurance money of the Sirius Company, kept everything they

could out of the papers, lest Lydia and Wrent should be put on their guard and so escape.

Lucian had been forced to report the death of Ferruci to the authorities. Now the case was out of his hands again and in those of Link, who blamed the young barrister severely for not having brought him into the matter before. The detective was always more prone to blame than to praise.

"But what could I do?" cried Lucian angrily. "You threw up the case twice, you said the assassin of Clear—or, as you thought, Vrain—would never be discovered."

"I did my best and failed," retorted Link, who did not like his position; "you have had better luck and have succeeded."

"My luck has been sheer hard work, Link; I was not so faint-hearted as you to draw back at the first check."

"Well! well! the whole truth hasn't been discovered yet, Mr. Denzil. As you have found out this conspiracy I may learn who the assassin is."

"We know that already. The assassin is Wrent."

"You have yet to prove that."

"I?" said Lucian with disdain, "I prove nothing. I wash my hands of the whole affair. You are a detective, let me see what you will make of a case which has baffled you twice," and Denzil, with rage in his heart, went off, laughing at the discomfiture of Link.

At that moment the detective hated his successful rival with his whole heart.

Lucian took a hansom to the Royal John Hotel in Kensington, where Diana, in a great state of alarm, was reading the evening papers, which contained short notices of Ferruci's death. On seeing her lover she hurried forward anxiously and caught him by the hand.

"Lucian, I am so glad you have

come," she cried, leading him to a chair. "I sent messages both to Geneva Square and Serjeants' Inn, but you were neither at your lodgings nor in your office."

"I was better employed, my dear," said Lucian with a weary sigh, for he was quite worn out with fatigue and anxiety. "I have been with Link, telling him about Ferruci's death, and being blamed as the cause of it."

"You blamed! and why?" said Diana with just indignation.

"Because I forced Ferruci to confess the truth, and when he saw that there was every chance of his being put into jail for his villainy, he went to his bedroom and took poison. You know, Mrs. Clear said the man was something of a chemist, so I suppose he prepared the poison himself. It was very swift in its action, for he dropped dead before I could recover my presence of mind."

"Lucian, this is terrible," cried Diana wringing her hands.

"You may well say that," he replied gloomily; "now the whole details of the case will be in the papers, and that unfortunate woman will be arrested."

"Lydia! And what will her father say? It will break his heart."

"Perhaps! but he must take the consequence of having brought up his daughter so badly. Still," added Lucian reflectively, "I do not believe that Lydia is so guilty as Wrent. That scoundrel seems to be at the bottom, of the affair. Ferruci and he contrived and carried out the whole thing between them, and a precious pair of villains they are."

"Will Wrent be arrested?"

"If he can be found; but I fancy the scoundrel has made himself scarce out of fright. Since he left Jersey Street after the murder, he has not been heard of. Even Mrs. Clear does not know where he is. You know she

has put advertisements in the papers in the cypher he gave her—according to the arrangement between them—but Wrent has not turned up."

"And Rhoda?"

"Rhoda is still missing. The police are getting warrants out for the servant, for Wrent, for Mrs. Clear, and for Lydia Vrain. Ferruci, luckily for himself and his family, has escaped the law by his own act. It was the wisest thing the scoundrel could do to kill himself and avoid dis-honour. I must admit the man had pluck."

"It is terrible! terrible! What will be the end of it?"

"Imprisonment for the lot, I expect, unless they can prove that Wrent murdered Clear; then they will hang him. But now that Ferruci is dead, I fancy Rhoda is the only witness who can prove Wrent's guilt. That is why she ran away. I don't wonder she was afraid to stay. But I feel quite worn out with all this, Diana. Please give me a biscuit and a glass of port; I have had nothing all day."

With a sigh Diana touched the bell, and when the waiter made his appearance gave the order. She felt low-spirited and nervous in spite of the discovery that her father was alive and well; and indeed the extraordinary events of the last few days were sufficient to upset the strongest mind.

Lucian was leaning back in his chair with closed eyes, for his head was aching with the excitement of the morning. Suddenly he opened them and jumped up. At the same time Diana threw open the door with an exclamation, and both of them heard the thin high voice of a woman who apparently was coming up the stairs.

"Never mind my name," said the voice, "I'll tell it to Miss Vrain myself. Take me to her at once."

"Lydia!" cried Lucian, "and here?"

Great heavens, why does she come here?"

Diana said nothing, but compressed her lips as Lydia, followed by the waiter with the biscuits and wine, came into the room. She was plainly and neatly dressed, and wore a heavy veil, but seemed greatly excited. She did not say a word, nor did Diana, until the waiter left the room and closed the door. Then she threw up her veil, revealing a haggard face and red eyes, swollen with weeping, and filled with an expression of terror.

"Sakes alive, isn't this awful?" she wailed, making a clutch at Miss Vrain's arm. "You've done it this time, Diana. Ferruci's dead and your father alive, and I'm not a widow, and my father away I don't know where. I was told that the police were after me, so I'm clearing out."

"Clearing out, Mrs. Vrain?" repeated Diana stiffly.

"I should think so," sobbed Lydia. "I don't want to stay and be put in gaol; though what I've done to be put in gaol for I don't know."

"What?" cried Lucian indignantly. "You don't know; when this abominable conspiracy is—"

"I know nothing of the conspiracy!" interrupted Lydia.

"Did you not get Ferruci to put your husband into an asylum?"

"I? I did nothing of the sort. I thought my husband was dead and buried until Ferruci told me the truth, and then I held my tongue until I could think of what to do. After Ercole died, his servant came round and told me all—he overheard the conversation you had with the Count, Mr. Denzil. I was never so astonished in my life as to hear about Mrs. Clear and her husband; and Mark alive—and—and—Oh, Lord! isn't it dreadful? Give me a glass of wine, Diana, or I'll go right off in a dead faint."

In silence Miss Vrain poured out a glass of port and handed it to her stepmother, who sipped it in a most tearful mood. Lucian looked at the wretched little woman without saying a word; and wondered if indeed she was as innocent as she made herself out to be. He thought that after all she might be ignorant of Ferruci's plots, although she had certainly benefited by them; but she was such a glib liar that he did not know how much to believe of her story. However, she had hitherto only given a general idea of her connection with the matter, so when she had finished her wine, and was somewhat calmer, Lucian begged her to be more explicit.

"Did you know—did you guess, or even suspect—that your husband was alive?"

"Mr. Denzil," said Lydia with unusual solemnity, "as I'm a married woman, and not the widow I thought I was, I did not know that Mark was alive. I'm bad, I daresay, but I am not bad enough to shut a man up in a lunatic asylum and pretend he is dead just to get money, much as I like it. What I did about identifying the corpse was done in good faith."

"You really thought it was my father's body?" questioned Diana doubtfully.

"I swear I did," responded Mrs. Vrain emphatically. "Mark walked out of the house because he thought I was carrying on with Ferruci, which I wasn't. It was that Tyler cat who made the trouble between us, and Mark was so weak and silly—half crazy, I think, with his morphia and over-study—that he cleared right out, and I never knew where he had gone to. When I saw that notice about the murdered man in Geneva Square, who called himself Berwin, and was marked on the cheek, I thought he might be my husband. When the coffin was opened, I really believed I saw poor Mark's dead body. The

face was just like his, and scarred in the same way."

"What about the missing finger? Mrs. Vrain? If I remember, you even gave a cause for its loss."

"Well, it was this way," replied Lydia, somewhat discomposed. "I knew that Mark hadn't lost a finger when he left, but Ferruci said that if I denied it the police might refuse to believe that the body was that of my husband. So as I was sure it was Mark's corpse I just said he had lost a finger out West. I didn't think there was any harm in saying so, as for all I knew he might have got it chopped off after leaving me. But the face of the dead man was—as I thought—Mark's, and he called himself Berwin, which, you know, Diana, is the name of the Manor, and the scar was on the cheek. I know now it was all contrived by Ercole; but then I was quite ignorant."

"When did you find out the truth?"

"After that cloak business. Ferruci came to me, and I told him what that girl at Baxter's had said, and insisted that he should tell me the truth. Well, he did, in order to force me to marry him, and then I told him to go and make it right with the girl, so that when Mr. Denzil went again she'd deny that Ercole bought the cloak."

"She denied it, sure enough," said Lucian grimly. "Ferruci before he died told me he had bribed her to speak falsely. What more did the Count reveal to you, Mrs. Vrain?—the conspiracy?"

"Yes. He said he'd found Mark hiding at Salisbury half mad with morphia, and had taken him up to Mrs. Clear's, where it seems he went mad altogether, so they locked him up as her husband in a lunatic asylum. Ferruci also told me that he had seen Michael Clear on the stage, and that as he was so like Mark, and was likely to die of drink and consumption, he got him to play the part of Mark in

Geneva Square under the name of Berwin. Mrs. Clear visited her husband there by climbing over a back fence, and getting down a cellar somehow."

"I know that," said Lucian. "It was Mrs. Clear's shadow I saw on the blind. She was fighting with her husband, and when I rang the bell they were both so alarmed that they left the house by the back way, and got into Jersey Street. Then Mrs. Clear went home, and the man himself came round into the Square by the front way. That was how I met him; I wondered how people were in the house during his absence. Mrs. Clear told me all."

"Did she say why her husband made you examine the house?" asked Diana.

"No! But I expect he made me do so that I should not have my suspicions about that back entrance. But, Mrs. Vrain, when Ferruci confessed that your husband was alive, why did you not tell it to the world?"

"Well, I'd got the assurance money, you see," said Lydia with shrewd candour, "and I thought the company would make a fuss and take it back—as, I suppose, they will now. Ferruci wanted me to marry him, but I wasn't so bad as that. I did not want to commit bigamy. But I really held my tongue because Ferruci told me who killed Clear."

"He knew, then?" cried Lucian, "and denied it to me. Who killed the man?"

"Wrent did; the man who lived in Jersey Street."

"And who is at the bottom of the whole plot?" said Lucian furiously. "Do you know where he is to be found?"

"Yes," said Lydia boldly. "I do; but I'm not going to tell where he is."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want him punished."

"But I do," said Diana angrily. "He is a wretch who ought to suffer."

"Very well," said Lydia loudly and spitefully; "then make him suffer, for this Wrent is your own father. It was Mark who killed Michael Clear."

CHAPTER XXIX

LINK SETS A TRAP

In the course of their acquaintance, Diana had put up with a great deal from the little American adventuress, owing to her position of step-mother; but when she heard her accusing the man she had ruined, of murder, the patience of Miss Vrain gave way. She rose quickly, and walking over to where Lydia was shrinking in her chair, towered in righteous indignation above the shameless little woman.

"You lie, Mrs. Vrain!" she said in a low distinct voice, with a flushed face and indignation in her eyes. "You know you lie."

"I—I only repeat what Ferruci told me," whimpered Lydia, rather alarmed by the attitude of her step-daughter. "I'm sure I hope Mark didn't kill the

man ; but Ercole said that he was in Jersey Street for that purpose."

"It is not true ; my father was in the asylum at Hampstead."

"Indeed he wasn't—not at the time Clear was killed," protested Lydia. "He was not put into the asylum until at least two weeks after Christmas. Is that not so, Mr. Denzil ?"

"It is so," assented Lucian gravely, "but even admitting so much, it is impossible to believe that Mr. Vrain was in Jersey Street. For many months before Christmas he was in charge of Mrs. Clear at Bayswater."

"So Ercole said," replied Lydia, "but he used to get away from Mrs. Clear at times and had to be brought back."

"He wandered when he got the chance," said Lucian with hesitation. "I admit as much."

"Well, then, when he was not at Bayswater he used to live in Jersey Street as Wrent. Ferruci found him out there and tried to get him to go back, and he took Mrs. Clear several times to the same place in order to persuade him to return to Bayswater. That was why Mrs. Clear visited Jersey Street. Oh, Mark played his part there as Mr. Wrent, I guess ; there ain't no two questions about that," finished Lydia triumphantly. "He is the assassin, you bet."

"I don't believe it," cried Diana furiously. "Why, my father is too weak in the head to have the will, let alone the courage, to masquerade like that. He is like a child in leading strings."

"That's his cunning, Diana. He's 'cute enough to pretend madness, so that he won't be hanged."

"It is impossible that Vrain can be Wrent," said Lucian decidedly. "I agree with Miss Vrain ; he is too weak and irresponsible to carry out such a deed. Besides, I don't see how you prove him guilty of the murder ; you do not even know that

he could enter the Silent House by the secret way."

"I don't know anything about it, except what Count Ferruci told me," said Lydia obstinately. "And he said that Vrain as Wrent killed Clear. But you can easily prove if it's true or not."

"How can we prove it ?" asked Diana coldly.

"By laying a trap for Mark. You know—at least Ercole told me, and I suppose Mrs. Clear told you—that she corresponded with Mark—Wrent, I mean—in the agony column of the *Daily Telegraph*."

"By means of a cypher ? Yes, I know that, but she hasn't received any answer yet."

"Of course not," replied Lydia with triumph, "because Wrent—that's Mark you know—is in the asylum and can't answer her."

"This is all nonsense," broke in Lucian, impatient of this cobweb spinning. "I don't believe a word of Ferruci's story. If Vrain lived in Jersey Street as Wrent, why should Mrs. Clear visit him ?"

"To get him back to Bayswater."

"Nonsense ! nonsense ! and even admitting as much, why should Mrs. Clear, in the newspapers, correspond in cypher with a man whom she not only knows is in an asylum as her husband, but who can be seen by her at any time ?"

"I quite agree with you, Lucian," cried Diana emphatically. "Count Ferruci told a pack of falsehoods to Mrs. Vrain. The thing is utterly absurd."

"Oh, I guess I'm not so easily made a fool of as all that," cried Lydia, firing up. "If you don't believe me, lay the trap I told you of. Let Mark go free out of the asylum ; get Mrs. Clear with her cypher and newspapers to ask him to meet her in the house where Clear was murdered, and then you'll see if Mark won't turn up in his character of Wrent."

"He will not!" cried Diana vehemently, "he will not."

"Mark, when he left me," went on the angry Lydia, "had plenty of hair, and was clean-shaven. Now—as Ferruci told me, for I haven't seen him—he is bald and wears a skull-cap of black velvet, and a white beard. After Ercole told me about Jersey Street, I went there to ask that fat woman about Mark; she said he had gone away two days after Christmas, and described him as an old man with a skull-cap and a white beard."

"Oh!" cried Lucian; for he recollects that Rhoda gave the same description.

"Ah, you know I speak the truth," said Lydia rising, "but I've had enough of all this. I've lost my money, and I don't suppose I'll go back to Mark. I've been treated badly all round, and I don't know what poppa will say. But I'm going out of London to meet him."

"You said you did not know where your father was?" cried Diana scornfully.

"I don't tell you everything, Diana," retorted Lydia, looking very wicked, "but, if you must know, poppa went over to Paris last week, and I'm going over there to meet him. He'll raise Cain for the way I've been treated."

"Well," said Lucian, as she prepared to take her leave, "I hope you'll get away."

"Do you intend to stop me, Mr. Denzil?" flashed out Mrs. Vrain furiously.

"Not I; but I'll give you a hint. The railway stations will be watched by the police."

"For me?" said Lydia with a scared expression. "Oh, sakes, it's awful, and I've done nothing. It's not my fault if I got the assurance money. I really thought that Mark was dead. But I'll try and get away to poppa; he'll put things right. Good-bye, Mr. Denzil and Diana; you've done me a heap of harm, but I don't bear malice," and Mrs. Vrain rushed out of the room

in a great hurry to escape the chance of arrest hinted at by Lucian. She had a sharp eye to her own safety.

Diana waited until the cab which Lydia had kept waiting was driving away, and then turned with an anxious expression on her face to look at Lucian. "My dear," she said, taking his arm, "what do you think of Lydia's accusation?"

"Against your father?" said Lucian. "Why, I don't believe it."

"Nor do I; but it will be as well to set the trap she suggests; for if my father does not fall into it—and as he is not Wrent, I don't believe he will—the real man may keep the appointment with Mrs. Clear."

"Whosoever Wrent is I don't think he'll come again to the Silent House," replied the barrister, shaking his head. "It would be thrusting his head into the lion's jaws. If he is in London he'll see the death of Ferruci described in the paper, and no doubt will guess that the game is up; so he'll keep away."

"Nevertheless we'll do as Lydia suggests," said Diana obstinately. "You see Mr. Link and Mrs. Clear, and arrange about the cypher. Then my father is to be discharged as cured tomorrow, and I'll let him go out if he pleases. Of course I'll follow him; then I'll be able to see if he goes to Pimlico."

"But, Diana, suppose he does go to the Silent House and proves to be Wrent?"

"He won't do that, my dear. My father is no more Wrent than you are. I believe Lydia speaks in the full belief that he is; but Ferruci for his own ends lied to her. However, to trap the real man let us do as Lydia suggests. The idea is a good one."

"Well, we'll try," said Lucian with a sigh. "But I do hope, Diana, that this case will end soon. Every week there is some fresh development in a new direction, and I am getting quite bewildered over it."

"It will end with the capture of Wrent, the assassin."

"I hope so, and God grant Wrent does not prove to be your father."

"There is no fear of that," said Diana gravely. "My father is insane more or less, but he is not a murderer. I am quite content to risk the trap suggested by that woman."

Lucian did not at once adopt the plan to net Wrent—whosoever he might be—invented by Lydia and approved of by Diana. On the whole, he could not bring himself to believe that a weak-headed, foolish old creature like Vrain had masqueraded in Jersey Street as Wrent. Still there were certain suspicious incidents which fitted in very neatly with Ferruci's story. Mrs. Clear had stated that Vrain when under her charge escaped several times, and had remained away for several days, until brought back again by the Count. Again, the appearance of Wrent as described by Rhoda was precisely the same as the looks of Vrain when Lucian saw him in the Hampstead asylum; so it seemed that there might be some truth in the story.

"But it's impossible," said Lucian to himself. "Vrain is half mad and incapable of conducting his own life, or arranging so cleverly to commit a crime. Also he had no money, and, had he lived in Jersey Street, would not have been able to pay Mrs. Bensusan. There is something more in the coincidence of this similarity of looks than meets the eye. I'll see Link and hear what he has to say on the subject. It's time he found out something."

The next day Lucian paid a visit to Link, but was not received very amiably by that gentleman, who proved to be in a somewhat bad temper. He was not altogether pleased with Lucian finding out more about the case than he had discovered himself, and also—to further ruffle his temper—the clever Lydia had given him the slip. He had called at her

Mayfair House with a warrant for her arrest, only to find out that—having received timely warning from Ferruci's servant—she had fled. In vain the railway stations had been watched. Lydia, taking the hint given to her by Lucian, had baffled that peril by taking the Dover train at a station outside London.

Lucian heard what Link had to say on the subject, but did not reveal the fact that Lydia had paid a visit to Diana, or had gone to meet her father at Dover. He did not want to give the little woman up to justice, as he was beginning to believe her innocent: and that in all truth she had known nothing of the Ferruci-Wrent conspiracy.

Therefore, giving no information to Link as to the little woman's whereabouts, Denzil told—as coming from himself—his idea that Wrent might fall into a trap set for him in the Pimlico House by means of Mrs. Clear's cypher. Link listened to the tale attentively, and decided to adopt the idea.

"It is a good one," he admitted generously, "and I'm not jealous enough to cut off my nose to spite my face. You have had the better of me all through this case, Mr. Denzil, and we have had words over it; but I'll show you that I can appreciate your cleverness by adopting your plan."

"I am greatly obliged to you for your good opinion," said Lucian drily, for he saw with some humour that Link was only too anxious to benefit by the very cleverness of which he pretended to be so jealous. "And you will see Mrs. Clear ?"

"Yes; I'll see her at once, and get her to invite Wrent to Pimlico by that cypher, with a threat that she will betray the whole plot if he does not come."

"I daresay he knows already that Mrs. Clear is a traitress ?"

"Impossible," replied Link quickly. "I have kept Mrs. Clear's name out of the papers. It is known that Ferruci

is dead, and that Mrs. Vrain is likely to be arrested in connection with her supposed husband's murder. But the fact of Mrs. Clear putting the real Vrain into the asylum is not known, nor indeed anything about the woman. If Wrent thinks she'll tell tales, he'll meet her in their own hunting-grounds in Geneva Square, to make his terms. Hitherto he has not replied to her requests for money, but now he'll think she is driven into a corner, and will fix her up once and for all."

"Do you think that Wrent is Vrain?"

"Good Lord, no!" replied Link staring, "what put that into your head?"

Lucian immediately told about the supposed connection between Vrain and Wrent; but, suppressing that it was Lydia's or Ferruci's idea, based his supposition on the fact of the resemblance between the two men. Link heard the theory with scorn, and scouted the idea that the two men could be one and the same.

"I've seen Vrain," said he; "the old man is as mad as a March hare and as silly as a child. He's in his dotage, and could not possibly carry out such a plan. But we can easily learn the truth."

"From whom?" asked Lucian.

"Ah, Mr. Denzil, you are not so clever as you think yourself," scoffed Link. "Why, from Mrs. Clear to be sure. She visited at Jersey Street and saw Wrent, and as Vrain was then with her in the character of her husband, she'll be able to tell us if they are two men or one person."

"You are right, Link. I never thought of that."

"He! He! then I can still teach you something," replied Link in high good humour at having for once scored off the too clever barrister, and forthwith went off to see Mrs. Clear.

How his interview with that lady sped, or what she told him, he refused

to reveal to Lucian; but its result was that a cypher appeared in the agony column of the *Daily Telegraph* calling upon Wrent to meet her in the Silent House in Pimlico, under the penalty of her telling the police all she knew if he did not come. In the same issue of the paper in which this message appeared there was a paragraph stating that Mrs. Vrain had been arrested at Dover.

CHAPTER XXX

WHO FELL INTO THE TRAP?

HOWEVER closely one may study the fair sex, there is no understanding them in the least. No one can say how a woman will act in a given situation; for feminine actions are based less on logical foundations than on the emotion of the moment.

Diana had never liked Lydia; when the American girl became her step-mother she hated her, and not only said as much but showed in her every action that she believed what she said. She declared that she would

be glad to see Lydia deprived of her money and put into jail ! The punishment would be no more than she deserved.

Yet when these things came to pass; when by the discovery that Vrain yet lived Lydia lost her liberty; and when, as connected with the conspiracy, she was arrested on a criminal warrant and put into prison, Diana was the only friend she had. Miss Vrain declared that her step-mother was innocent, visited her in prison, and engaged a lawyer to defend her. Lucian could not forbear pointing out the discrepancy between Diana's past sentiments and her present actions; but Miss Vrain was quite ready with an excuse.

"I am only doing my duty," she said. "In herself I like Lydia as little as ever I did, but I think we have suspected her wrongly in being connected with this conspiracy, so I wish to help her if possible. And after all," added Diana, "she is my father's wife," as if that fact extenuated all.

"He has reason to know it," replied Lucian bitterly. "If it had not been for Lydia, your father would not have left his home for a lunatic asylum, nor would Clear have been murdered."

"I quite agree with you, Lucian; but some good has come out of this evil, for if things had not been as they are, you and I would never have met."

"Egad, that is true," said Lucian, kissing her; "it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good."

So Diana played the part of a good Samaritan towards her step-mother, and helped her to bear the evil of being thrust into prison. Lydia wrote to her father in Paris, but received no reply, and therefore was without a friend in the world save Diana. Later on she was admitted out on bail, and Diana took her to the hotel in Kensington, there to wait for the arrival of

Mr. Clyne. His absence and silence were both unaccountable.

"I hope nothing is wrong with poppa," wept Lydia. "As a rule he is always smart in replying; and if he has seen about Ercole's death and my imprisonment in the papers I'm sure he will be over soon."

While she was thus waiting for her father, and Link in every way was seeking evidence against her, Mrs. Clear received an answer to her message. In the same column of the *Daily Telegraph*, and in the same cypher, there appeared a message from Wrent that he would meet Mrs. Clear at No. 13 Geneva Square.

Link was delighted when Mrs. Clear showed him this, and rubbed his hands with much pleasure. Affairs were about to be brought to a crisis, and as Link was the moving spirit in the matter his vanity was sufficiently gratified as to make him quite amiable.

"We've got him this time, Mr. Denzil," he said with enthusiasm. "You and I and a couple of policemen will go down to that house in Geneva Square—by the front, sir, by the front."

"Mrs. Clear also?" questioned Lucian, wishing to be enlightened on all points.

"No! She'll come in by the back: down the cellar way as Wrent expects her to come. Then he'll follow in the same path and walk right into the trap."

"But won't the two be seen climbing over that fence in the daytime?" asked the barrister doubtfully.

"Who said anything about the daytime, Mr. Denzil? I did not, and Wrent knows too much to risk himself at a time that he can be seen from the windows of the adjacent houses. No! no! the meeting with Mrs. Clear is to take place in the front room at ten o'clock, when it will be quite dark. You, I, and the policeman will hide in what was the bedroom, and listen to

what Wrent has to say to Mrs. Clear. We'll give him rope enough to hang himself, sir, and then pounce out and nab him."

"Well, he won't show much fight if he is Mr. Vrain!"

"I don't believe he is Mr. Vrain," retorted the detective bluntly.

"I am doubtful of that also," admitted Lucian, "but you know Vrain is now out of the asylum, and, for the time being, has been left to his own devices. The reply to the cypher did not appear until he was in that position. Supposing, after all, this mysterious Wrent proves to be this unhappy man?"

"In that case, he'll have to pay for his whistle, sir."

"You mean in connection with the conspiracy?"

"Yes, and perhaps with the murder of Clear; but we don't know if the so-called Wrent committed the crime. For such reason, Mr. Denzil, I wish to overhear what he says to Mrs. Clear. It is as well to give him enough rope to hang himself with."

"Can you trust Mrs. Clear?"

"Absolutely. She knows on which side her bread is buttered. Her only chance of getting free from her share of the matter is to turn Queen's Evidence. And she intends to do so."

"What did she say about Vrain being Wrent?"

"Well, sir," said Link, putting his head on one side and looking at Lucian with an odd expression, "you had better wait till the man's caught before I answer that question. Then, maybe, you won't require an answer."

"It is very probable I won't," replied Lucian drily. "What time am I to see you to-night?"

"I'll call for you at nine o'clock sharp, and we'll go across to the house at once. I have the key in my pocket now. Peacock gave it to me this morning. The scene will be quite dramatic."

"I hope it won't prove to be Vrain," said Lucian restlessly, for he thought how grieved Diana would be.

"I hope not," answered Link curtly, "but there's no knowing. However, if the old man does get into troubl'e he can plead insanity. His having been in the asylum of Jorce is a strong card for him to play. Good-day, Mr. Denzil, I'll see you to-night at nine o'clock sharp."

"Good-day!" replied Lucian, and the pair parted for the time being.

Lucian did not go near Diana that day. In the first place, he did not wish to see Lydia, for whom he had no great love; and in the second, he was afraid to speak to Diana as to the possibility of her father being Wrent.

Diana, as a good daughter should, held firmly to the idea that her father could not behave in such a way; and, as a sensible woman, she did not think that a man with so few of his senses about him could have acted the dual part with which he was credited without, in some measure, betraying him self.

Lucian was somewhat of this opinion himself, yet he had an uneasy feeling that Vrain might prove to be the culprit. The fact of Vrain's being often away from Mrs. Clear's house in Bayswater, and Wrent absent in the same way from Mrs. Bensusan's house in Jersey Street, appeared strange, and argued a connection between the two. Again the resemblance between them was most extraordinary and unaccountable.

On the whole, Lucian was not satisfied in his mind as to what would be the end of the matter, and, had he known Mrs. Clear's address, he would have gone to question her about it. But only Link knew where the woman was to be found, and kept that information to himself—especially from Denzil. Now that he had the reins once more in his hands, he did not intend that the barrister should take them again.

Punctual to the minute, Link, in a state of subdued excitement, came to Lucian's rooms. Already he had sent his two policemen over to the house, into which he had instructed them to enter in the quietest and most unostentatious manner, and now came to escort the barrister across.

Lucian put on his hat at once, and the two walked out into the dark night, for dark it was, with no moon, few stars, and a great many clouds. A most satisfactory night for their purpose.

"All the better," said Link, casting a look round the deserted square, "all the better for our little game; I wish to secure this fellow as quietly as possible. Here's the door open—in with you, Mr. Denzil."

According to instructions a policeman had waited behind the closed door, and at the one sharp knock of his superior opened it at once so that the two slipped in as speedily as possible. Link had a dark lantern which he used carefully, so that no light could be seen from the window looking on to the square; and with his three companions he went into the back room which had formerly been used by Clear as a sleeping apartment. Here the two policemen stationed themselves in one corner; and Link with Lucian waited near the door leading into the sitting-room, so as to be ready for Mrs. Clear.

All was so dark and lonely and silent that Lucian's nerves became over-strained and it was as much as he could do to prevent himself from trembling violently. In a whisper he conversed with Link.

"Have you heard anything of that girl Rhoda?" he asked.

"We have traced her to Berkshire," whispered Link. "She went back to her gipsy kinsfolk, you know. I dare-say we'll manage to lay hands on her sooner or later."

"She is an accomplice of Wrent's I believe."

"So do I, and I hope to make him confess as much to-night. Hush!"

Suddenly Link had laid his clasp on Lucian's wrist to command silence, and the next moment they heard the swish-swish of a woman's dress coming along the passage. She entered the sitting-room cautiously, moving slowly in the darkness, and stole up to the door behind which Lucian and the detective were hiding. The position of this she knew well, because it was opposite the window.

"Are you there?" whispered Mrs. Clear nervously.

"Yes!" replied Link in the same tones. "Myself, Mr. Denzil, and two policemen; keep the man in talk, and find out if possible if he committed the murder."

"I hope he won't kill me," muttered Mrs. Clear. "He will if he knows I've betrayed him."

"That will be all right," said Link in a low impatient voice. "We will rush out should he prove dangerous. Get over by the window, so that we can see a little of you and Wrent when you talk."

"No! no! don't leave the door open; he'll see you."

"He won't, Mrs. Clear. We'll keep back in the darkness. If he shows a light we'll rush him before he can use a weapon or clear out. Get back to the window."

"I hope I'll get through with this all right," said Mrs. Clear nervously. "It's an awful situation," and she moved stealthily across the floor to the window.

There was a faint gaslight outside, and the watchers could see her figure and profile black against the slight illumination. All was still and silent as the grave when they began their dreary watch.

The minutes passed slowly in the darkness, and there was an unbroken silence save for the breathing of the watchers and the restless movements of Mrs. Clear near the window. They saw her pass and repass the square of

glass, when unexpectedly she paused rigid and silent.

A stealthy step was ascending the distant stair, and pacing cat-like along the passage.

Lucian felt a tremor pass through his body as the steps of the murderer sounded nearer and clearer. They paused at the door, and then moved towards the window where Mrs. Clear was standing.

"Is that you?" said a low voice which came weirdly out of the darkness.

"Yes, I have been waiting for the last half-hour, Mr. Wrent," replied the woman in nervous tones. "I am glad you have come."

"I am glad also," said the voice harshly, "as I wish to know why you propose to betray me."

"Because you won't pay me the money," said Mrs. Clear boldly. "And if you don't give it to me this very night I'll go straight and tell the police all about my husband."

"I'll kill you first," cried the man with a snarl, and made a dash at the woman. With a cry for help she eluded him and sprang towards the bedroom door for protection. The next moment the four watchers were in the room wrestling with Wrent. When he felt the grip of their hands and knew that he was betrayed, he cried out savagely and fought with the strength of two men. However he could do little against his four adversaries, and worn out with the struggle collapsed suddenly on to the dusty floor with a motion of despair.

"Lost! lost!" he muttered. "All lost."

Breathing hard, Link slipped back the cover of the dark lantern, and turned the light on to the face of the prisoner. Out of the darkness started a pale face with white hair and long white beard. Lucian uttered a cry.

"Mr. Vrain," he said shrinking back, "Mr. Vrain!"

"Look again," said Link, passing his hand rapidly over the face and head of the prostrate man. Denzil did look and uttered a second cry more startling than the first. Wig and beard and venerable looks were all gone, and he recognised at once who Wrent was.

"Jabez Clyne! Jabez Clyne," he exclaimed in astonishment.

"Yes!" cried Link triumphantly, "Jabez Clyne, conspirator and assassin."

CHAPTER XXXI

A STRANGE CONFESSION

"I, JABEZ CLYNE, write this confession in my prison cell of my own free will, and without coercion from any one; partly because I know that the evidence concerning my share in the Vrain conspiracy is strong against me, and partly because I wish to exonerate my daughter Lydia.

"She is absolutely innocent of all knowledge concerning the feigned

death of her husband and his actual existence in a private lunatic asylum ; and on the strength of this confession of mine—which will fix the guilt of the matter on the right persons—I demand that she shall be set free. It is not fair that she should suffer, for I and Ferruci planned and carried out the whole conspiracy. Well, Ferruci has punished himself, and soon the law will punish me, so it is only justice that Lydia should be discharged from all blame. On this understanding I set out the whole story of the affair—how it was thought of, how it was contrived, and how it was carried out. Now that Count Ferruci is dead, this confession can harm no one but myself, and may be the means of setting Lydia free. So here I begin my recital.

"I was always an unlucky man, and the end of my life proves to be as unfortunate as the beginning. I was born in London some fifty and more years ago, in a Whitechapel slum, of drunken and profligate parents, so it is little to be wondered at that my career has been anything but virtuous or respectable. In my early childhood—if it may be called so—I was beaten and starved, set to beg, forced to thieve, and never had a kind word said to me or a kind deed done to me. No wonder I grew up a callous, hardened ruffian. As the twig is bent, so will the tree grow.

"Out of this depth of degradation I was rescued by a philanthropist, who had me fed and clothed and educated. I had at his hands every chance of leading a respectable life, but I did not want to become smug and honest. My early training was too strong for that, so after a year or two of enforced goodness I ran away to sea. The vessel I embarked on, as a stowaway, was bound for America. When I was discovered hiding among the cargo we were in mid-ocean, and there was nothing for it but to carry me to the States. Still, to earn my passage, I

was made cabin-boy to a ruffianly captain, and once more tasted the early delights of childhood, *viz.*, kicks, curses, and starvation. When the ship arrived in New York I was turned adrift in the city without a penny or a friend.

"It is not my purpose to describe my sufferings, as such description will do no good and interest nobody ; particularly as the purpose of this confession is to declare the Vrain conspiracy and its failure ; so I will pass over my early years as speedily as possible. To be brief : I became a newsboy, then a reporter ; afterwards I went West and tried my luck in San Francisco, later on in Texas ; but in every case I failed, and became poorer and more desperate than ever. In New Orleans I set up a newspaper and had a brief time of prosperity, when I married the daughter of an hotel-keeper, and for the time was happy.

"Then the Civil War broke out and I was ruined. My wife died, leaving me with one child, whom I called Lydia after her, but that child died also, and I was left alone. After the war I prospered again for a time, and married a woman with money. She also died and left a daughter, and this child I again called Lydia in memory of my first wife, who was the only woman I ever truly loved. I placed little Lydia in a convent for education, and devoted my second wife's money to that purpose ; then I started out for the fifth or sixth time to make my fortune. Needless to say I did not make it.

"I pass over a long period of distress and prosperity, hopes and fears. One day I was rich, the next poor ; and Fate—or whatever malignant deity looked after my poor affairs—knocked me about most cruelly, tossed me up, threw me down, and at the end of a score of years left me comparatively prosperous with an income, in English money, of £500 a year. With this I

returned to Washington to seek Lydia and found her grown up into a beautiful and clever girl. Her beauty gave me the idea that I might marry her well in Europe as an American heiress. So for Europe we started, and after many years of travel about the Continent we settled down in the Pension Donizetti in Florence. There Lydia was admired for her beauty and wit, and courted for her money ! but save for my ten pounds a week, which we eked out in the most frugal manner, we had not a penny between us.

" It was in Florence that we met with Vrain and his daughter, who came to stay at the Pension. He was a quiet, harmless old gentleman, a trifle weak in the head, which his daughter said came from over-study, but which I discovered afterwards was due to habitual indulgence in morphia and other drugs. His daughter watched him closely, and—not having a will of his own by reason of his weak brain—he submitted passively to her guidance. I heard by a side-wind that Vrain was rich, and had a splendid mansion in the country ; so I hinted to Lydia that as it seemed difficult to get her a young husband, it would be better for her to marry a rich old one. At that time Lydia was in love with, and almost engaged to, Count Ercole Ferruci, a penniless Italian nobleman, who courted my pretty girl less for her beauty than for her supposed wealth. When I suggested that Lydia should marry Vrain, she refused at first to entertain the idea ; but afterwards, seeing that the man was old and weak, she thought it would be a good thing as his wife to inherit his money, and then as his widow to marry Ferruci. I think also that the pointed dislike which Diana Vrain manifested for us both—although I am bound to say she hated Lydia more than she did me—had a great deal to do with my daughter marrying Vrain. How-

ever, the end of it was that Lydia broke off her engagement with Ferruci—and very mad he was at losing her—and married Mark Vrain in Florence.

" After the marriage the old man, who at that time was quite infatuated with Lydia, made a will leaving her his assurance money of £20,000, but the house near Bath and the land he left to Diana. I am bound to say that Lydia behaved very well in this matter, as she could have had all the money and land, but she was content with the assurance money, and did not rob Diana Vrain of her birthright. Yet Diana hated her, and still hates her ; but I ask any one who reads this confession if my dear Lyddy is not the better woman of the two ? Who dares to say that such a sweet girl is guilty of the crimes she is charged with ?

" Well, the marriage took place, and we all journeyed home to Berwin Manor ; but here things went from bad to worse. Old Vrain took again to his morphia, and nothing would restrain him ; then Lydia and Diana fought constantly, and each wished the other out of the house. I tried to keep the peace, and blamed Lyddy—who is no saint, I admit—for the way in which she was treating Diana. With Miss Vrain I got on very well, and tried to make things easy for her ; but in the end the ill-will between her and my Lydia became so strong that Diana left the house, and went out to Australia to live with some relatives.

" So Lydia and I and old Vrain were left alone, and I thought that everything would be right. So it would have been if Lydia had not put matters wrong again by inviting Ferruci over to stay. But she would insist upon doing so, and although I begged and prayed and commanded her not to have so dangerous a man in the house she held her own ; and in the face of my remonstrances

and those of her husband, Count Ferruci came to stay with us.

"From the moment he entered the house there was nothing but trouble. Vrain became jealous, and, mad with the drugs he took, often treated Lydia with cruelty and violence, and she came to me for protection. I spoke to Vrain, and he insulted me, wishing to turn me out of the house, but for Lydia's sake I remained. Then a Miss Tyler came to stay, and falling in love with Count Ferruci, grew jealous of Lydia, and made trouble with Vrain. The end of it was that after a succession of scenes, in which the old man behaved like the lunatic he was, he left the house, and not one of us knew where he went to. That was the last Lydia saw of her husband.

"After that trouble I insisted that Count Ferruci should leave the house; also Miss Tyler. They both did, but came back at times to pay Lydia a visit. We tried to find Vrain, but could not, as he had vanished altogether. Ferruci, I saw, was in love with Lydia, and she with him, but neither the one nor the other hinted at a future marriage should Vrain die. I do not say that Lydia was a fond wife to Vrain, but he treated her so badly that he could not expect her to be; and I daresay I am the one to blame all through, as I made Lydia marry Vrain when she loved Ferruci. But I did it all for the best, so as to get money for my dear girl; and if it has turned out for the worst my inordinate affection for my child is to blame. All I have done has been for Lydia's sake; all Ferruci did was for Lydia's sake, as he truly loved her; but I swear by all that I hold most holy that Lydia knew not how either of us was working to secure her happiness. Well, Ferruci is dead, and I am in jail, so we have paid in full for our wickedness.

"I had no idea of getting rid of

Vrain, until one day Ferruci took me aside and told me that he had found Vrain at Salisbury. He stated that the man was still taking morphia, but in spite of his excesses had so strong a constitution that it appeared he would live for many years. The Count then said that he loved Lydia dearer than life and wished to marry her if Vrain could be got out of the way. I cried out against murder being done, as I never entertained such an idea for a moment; but Ferruci denied that he wished to harm the man. He wanted him put away in a lunatic asylum, and when I asked him how even then he could marry Lydia, he suggested his scheme of substituting a sickly and dying man for Vrain. The scheme—which was entirely invented by the Count—was as follows:—

"Ferruci said that in a minor London theatre he had seen an actor called Clear, who was wonderfully like Vrain, save that he had no scar on the cheek, and had a moustache, whereas Vrain was always clean-shaved. He had made the acquaintance of the actor—Michael Clear was his full name—and of his wife. They proved to be hard up and mercenary, so Ferruci had no difficulty in gaining over both for his purpose. For a certain sum of money (which was to be paid to Mrs. Clear when her husband was dead and the Count, married to Lydia, was possessed of the assurance money) Clear agreed to shave off his moustache and personate Vrain. Ferruci, who was something of a chemist, created by means of some acid a scar on Clear's cheek like that on Vrain's; so that he resembled my son-in-law in every way save that he had lost one little finger.

"Ferruci wanted me to join him in the conspiracy so that I could watch Clear impersonating Vrain, while he himself kept his eye on the

real Vrain, who was to be received into Mrs. Clear's house at Bayswater and passed off as her husband. All Mrs. Clear wanted was the money, as—long since wearied of her drunken husband—she did not care if he lived or died. Clear on his part, knowing that he could not live long, was quite willing to play the part of Vrain on condition that he had plenty to eat and drink and could live in idleness and luxury. His wishes in this direction cost us a pretty penny, as he bought everything of the best.

"To this plot I refused to consent until I saw how Vrain was, so when Ferruci brought him from Salisbury—where he was hiding—to London, I had an interview with him. He proved to be so stupefied with drugs that he hardly knew me, so, seeing that my Lydia would get no good out of her life by being tied to such a husband, I determined that I would assist Ferruci, on the understanding, of course, that Vrain was to be well looked after in every way. We agreed that when Clear died, and his body was identified as Vrain's, that the real man should be put in an asylum, which was, I think—and I am sure every one will agree with me—the best place for him.

"All this being arranged, I went out to look for a house in a secluded part of the town, in which Clear—under the name of Berwin—should live until he died as Vrain. I did not wish to see about the house in my new character lest I should be recognised, if there was any trouble over the assurance money; to complicate matters I determined to disguise myself as the real Vrain. Of course Clear personated Vrain as Lydia had last seen him, that is, clean-shaven and neat in his dress. But the real Vrain, neglecting his personal appearance, had cultivated a long white beard, and wore a black velvet skull-cap to conceal a baldness

which had come upon him. I disguised myself to this fashion, therefore and went to Pimlico under the name of Wrent.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE CONFESSION (*continued*)

"IN Geneva Square, Pimlico, I found the house I wanted. It was No. 13, and was said to be haunted, as cries had been heard in it at night, and lights had been seen flitting from window to window when no one was in the house. I looked at it without entering or calling on the landlord, and then I went into Jersey Street to see the back. The house in the same section with it was kept by a Mrs. Bensusan, who took in lodgers. Her rooms were vacant, and as it suited me very well that I should be a neighbour to Clear, I took the rooms. They proved—as I shall explain—better for our purpose than I was aware of.

"When I told Ferruci of my discovery, he gave Clear money and made him hire the house and furnish two rooms for himself. I supplied the money. In this way Clear, calling himself Berwin, which was the

name of Vrain's house in the country, came to live in Pimlico. We also removed the real Vrain to Mrs. Clear's at Bayswater; and he passed as her husband. So weak were his brains, and so cowed was his spirit, that there was no difficulty in keeping him in the house; and the neighbours were told merely that Clear was ill.

"For my part, I took up my abode in Jersey Street under the name of Wrent; and met Clear outside on occasions when it was necessary for me to see him; but I never entered the house—for obvious reasons.

"I was constantly afraid lest Clear in his drunken fits—for he was always more or less drunk—should reveal our secret, and I took as my bedroom an apartment in Mrs. Bensusan's out of the window of which I could overlook the back of No. 13. One night when I was watching, I saw a dark figure glide into Mrs. Bensusan's yard and climb over the fence, only to disappear. I was terribly alarmed, and wondering what was wrong, I put on my clothes and hurried downstairs into the yard. Also I climbed over the fence into the yard of No. 13. Here I could not see where the figure had disappeared to, as the doors and windows at the back of the house were all locked. I could not conjecture who the woman was—for it was a woman I saw—who had entered, or why she had done so, or in what way she had gained admission.

"While I was thus thinking I saw the woman again. She apparently rose out of the earth, and after closing what appeared to be a trap-door, she made for the fence. I stopped her before she got there, and found to my surprise that she was a red-headed servant of Mrs. Bensusan's—a kind of gipsy, very clever and—I think—with much evil in her. She was alarmed at being discovered, and begged me not tell on her. For my

own sake I promised not to do so, but made her explain how she got into the house and why she entered it. Then she told me an extraordinary tale.

"For some years, she said, she had been with Mrs. Bensusan, who had taken her from the gipsies to civilise her, and hating the restraint of civilised life, she had been in the habit of roaming about at night. Knowing that the house at the back was unoccupied, this Rhoda—for that is her name—climbed over the fence and tried to get into it, but found the doors and windows bolted and barred.

"Then one night she saw a kind of grated window amid the grass, and as this proved not to be bolted, she pulled it open. Taking a candle with her, she went on a voyage of discovery; and dropped through this hole some distance into a disused cellar. Only a cat could have got in safely; for the height was considerable, and indeed, Rhoda did not risk that mode of entrance again; for finding a ladder in the cellar which—I presume—had been used to get at the higher bins of wine, she placed this against the aperture, and thus was enabled to ascend and descend without difficulty. Frequently by this means she entered the empty house, and went from room to room with her candle, singing gipsy songs as she wandered. So here I had found the ghost of No. 13; although I don't suppose this impish gipsy girl knew as much. She haunted the house just to amuse herself, when fat Mrs. Bensusan thought she was safe in bed.

"I asked Rhoda why she had entered the house on that particular night when I had caught her. She confessed that she had seen some articles of silver in Clear's rooms which she wished to steal; but on this occasion he had locked the door—a thing which he did not always do in his drunken humours—and so

Rhoda was returning disappointed. After this confession I made her go back to her own house ; and promised to keep her secret. I also told her that if she held her tongue I would give her a present. For this purpose I made Ferruci buy me a cloak lined with rabbit skins, as Rhoda on her night excursions wanted something to keep her warm. When Ferruci gave it to me, and it was lying in my room, Mrs. Clear came one night to see me, and finding it cold, she borrowed the cloak to wrap round her. She kept it for some time and brought it back on Christmas Eve, when I gave it next day to Rhoda. It was Ferruci who bought the cloak, not I ; and it was purchased for Rhoda, not for Mrs. Clear.

"The next night I entered No. 13 by the cellar way and found it of great advantage, as I could visit Clear without exciting suspicion, and so keep an eye on him. At first he was alarmed by my unexpected appearance, but when I showed him the secret way he made use of it also. We used it only on dark nights, and it was for this reason that we were not noticed by the neighbours. It would never have done for any one of us to be seen climbing over the fence. Mrs. Clear once visited her husband and had a quarrel with him about his drinking. It was her shadow and Clear's which Denzil saw on the blind. As soon as they heard his ring, they both went out the back way ; and in climbing hurriedly over the fence Mrs. Clear tore her veil. It was a portion of this which Denzil found.

"On that night, Clear, after leaving his wife, entered the square by the front and so met with Denzil, much to the latter's surprise. I was very angry when Clear showed Denzil over the house ; but he said that the young man was very suspicious, and he only showed him the house to prove that there was no one in it ;

and that he must have been mistaken about the shadows on the blind. Notwithstanding this explanation, I did not approve of Clear's act, nor indeed of his acquaintance with Denzil.

"For some months matters went on in this way. Clear remained in the Silent House drinking himself to death ; Mrs. Clear looked after Vrain in her Bayswater house ; and I, in my old man disguise, remained in Jersey Street, although at times I left there and went to see my daughter. All this time Lydia had no idea of what we were preparing. Then I began to grow wearied of the position, for Clear proved tougher than we anticipated, and showed no signs of dying. In despair, I thought I would give him the means to kill himself.

"Mind I did not wish to murder him myself ; but the man, when in his drinking fits, thought he was attacked by enemies ; and, when in a melancholic frame of mind, on recovery would frequently hint at suicide. I therefore thought that if a weapon were left within his reach he might kill himself. I don't defend my conduct in this case ; but surely this drunken scoundrel was better dead than alive. In choosing a weapon I wished to select one that would implicate Ferruci rather than myself, in case there was any trouble over the matter ; so I chose for my purpose a stiletto which hung by a parti-coloured ribbon on the walls of the library at Berwin Manor. I fancied that the stiletto, having been bought in Florence, and Ferruci coming from Florence, he, if anyone—should any of these facts come to light —would be credited with giving it to Clear.

"I took this stiletto from Berwin Manor some time before Christmas, and, bringing it up to town, I left it—on the day before Christmas—on the table in Clear's sitting-room. That was at nine o'clock in the night, and

that was when I last saw him alive. Who killed him I know no more than anyone else.

"On Christmas Eve I was ill and wrote to Lydia to come up. She met me at the Pegall's, but as I felt ill I left there at six o'clock and Lydia stayed with the family all night. At seven o'clock Mrs. Clear came to me with Ferruci and brought back the cloak which I gave afterwards to Rhoda. She wanted to see her husband again, but I refused to let her risk the visit. Ferruci came to tell me that he was arranging to place Vrain—who was becoming too violent to be restrained—in the private asylum of Dr. Jorce, at Hampstead. Mrs. Clear was to go with him, and we conversed about the matter.

"Ferruci went away first, as he desired to see Clear, and for that purpose waited about until it was darker, and went in to the back yard shortly after eight o'clock. There he was seen by Rhoda as he was about to climb the fence, and, not knowing it was the girl, he took fright and ran out of the yard into Jersey Street. Here he found Mrs. Clear, who had left me and was waiting for him; and the pair went off to see Dr. Jorce at Hampstead. I believe they remained there all night.

"Left alone, I climbed over the fence about nine o'clock and saw Clear. He was celebrating Christmas Eve by drinking heavily, and I was unable to bring him to reason. I therefore left the stiletto which I had brought with me on the table, and returned to my house in Jersey Street. I never saw him alive again. I went to bed and slept all night, so I was aware of nothing in connection with the death until late on Christmas Day. Then Mrs. Bensusan was told by Miss Greeb (the landlady of Denzil) that the tenant of No. 13 had been murdered. I fancied that he had killed himself, in a fit of melancholia, with the stiletto I had

left on his table. But I did not dare to go near the house to find this out.

"Afterwards I learned that the doctor who examined the body was of opinion that Clear had been murdered; and being afraid about the police taking up the case, I paid Mrs. Bensusan a week's rent and left her house two days after Christmas. I returned to Berwin Manor, and shortly afterwards Ferruci joined me there, as he had successfully incarcerated Vrain in the asylum under the name of Michael Clear.

"When the advertisement came out it was I who hinted to Lydia that the dead man—seeing that he was called Berwin—might be her husband. We went up to town: Lydia identified the body of Clear as her husband in all innocence—for after death the man looked more like Vrain than ever; and in due time the assurance money was obtained.

"I do not think there is anything more to tell, save that I did not know that Mrs. Clear had betrayed me. I could not pay her the money, as I could not get it from Lydia. I told Lydia I was going to Paris, but in reality I was hunting for Rhoda, who had run away from Jersey Street. I fancied she might betray us and wished to make things safe with her. Before I found her, however, I saw in the papers that Ferruci had committed suicide; also that Lydia—who had gone to Dover to meet me, thinking I was returning from Paris—had been arrested. Then I saw Mrs. Clear's advertisement saying she would betray me if I did not pay the money. I consented to meet her in order to implore her silence, and so fell into the clutches of the law.

"I may state that I did not kill Clear, as I never saw him after nine o'clock, and then he was alive. In spite of what the doctor said, I am still inclined to think he killed himself. Now I have made a clean

breast of it—I am willing to be punished ; but I hope Lydia will be set free, for whosoever is guilty, she is innocent. I have been an unlucky man, and I remain one at this moment when I sign myself for the last time,

“ JABEZ CLYNE.”

Needless to say, both Link and Denzil were greatly surprised at this confession, which revealed all things save the one they wished to know.

“ What do you think of this idea of suicide ? ” asked Lucian.

“ It is quite out of the question,” replied the detective decidedly ; “ the doctor who examined the body said that it was impossible the man could have committed suicide. The position of the wound shows that ; also the power of the stroke ; no man could drive a stiletto so dexterously and strongly into his heart. Also the room was in confusion, which points to a struggle ; and the stiletto is missing. It was not suicide but murder ; and I believe either Clyne or Ferruci killed the man.”

“ But Ferruci was not — ”

“ He was not there after ten,” interrupted Link, “ but he was there about eight. I daresay when Rhoda saw him he was coming back after having committed the deed, and Clyne says the stiletto was not there at the time just to screen him.”

“ It is of little use to screen the dead,” said Lucian. “ I think only one person can tell the truth about this murder ; and that is Rhoda.”

“ I’m looking for her, Mr. Denzil.”

This was easy saying but harder doing ; for weeks passed away ; and, in spite of all the efforts of the police, Rhoda could not be found. Then one morning the detective, much excited,

burst into Lucian’s rooms waving a paper over his head.

“ A confession,” he cried, “ another confession.”

“ Of whom ? ” asked Lucian surprised.

“ Of Rhoda ! ” replied Link excitedly. “ She has confessed. It was Rhoda who killed Michael Clear.”

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHAT RHODA HAD TO SAY

Of all the news concerning the truth of Clear’s death, this was the last which Lucian expected to hear. He stood staring at the excited face of the detective in wide-eyed surprise, and for the moment could not find his voice.

“ It is true, I tell you,” cried Link, sitting down and smoothing out the paper which he carried. “ Rhoda, and none other killed the man.”

“ Are you sure, Link ? ”

“ Of course I am. This,” flourishing the paper, “ is her dying confession.”

“ Her dying confession ? ” repeated

the barrister blankly; "is she dead also?"

"Yes! It is a long story, Mr. Denzil. Sit down and I'll tell it to you; as you have had so much to do with the beginning of the case it is only fair that you should know the end; and a strange end it is."

Without a word Lucian sat down, feeling quite confused; for in no way could he guess how Clear had come by his death at the hands of Rhoda. He had suspected Lydia as guilty of the crime; he had credited Ferrucci with its commission, and he had been certain of the guilt of Clyne, alias Wrent; but to discover that the red-headed servant was the culprit entirely bewildered him. She had no motive to kill the man; she had given evidence freely in the matter, and in all respects had acted as an innocent person. So this was why she had left Jersey Street? It was a fear of being arrested for the crime which had driven her into the wilds. But, as Lucian privately thought, she need not have fled; for—so far as he could see—beyond the startling announcement of Link, there was no evidence to connect her with the matter. It was most extraordinary.

"I see you are astonished," said Link with a nod, "so was I. Of all folk, I least suspected that imp of a girl. The truth would never have been known, had she not confessed at the last moment; for, even now, I cannot see, on the face of it, any evidence—save her own confession—to inculpate her in the matter. So you see, Mr. Denzil, the mystery of this man's death, which we have been so anxious to solve, has not been explained by you, or discovered by me; but has been brought to light by chance, which, after all, is the great detective. You may well look astonished," repeated the man slowly, "I am, immensely."

"Let me hear the confession, Link!"

"Wait one moment. I'll tell you how it came to be made, and then I'll relate the story in my own fashion; as the way in which the confession is written is too muddled for you to understand clearly. Still it shows plainly enough that Clyne, for all our suspicions, is innocent."

"And Rhoda, the sharp servant girl, guilty," said Lucian reflectively. "I never should have thought that she was involved in the matter. How the deuce did she come to confess?"

"Well!" said Link, clearing his throat as a preliminary to his narrative, "it seems that Mr. Bensusan in a fit of philanthropy picked up this wretched girl in the country. She belonged to some gipsies, but as her parents were dead, and the child a burden, the tribe were glad to get rid of her. Rhoda Stanley—that is her full name—was taken to London by Mrs. Bensusan, who tried to civilise her."

"I don't think she succeeded very well, Link. Rhoda, with her cunning ways, and roaming about at night, was always a savage at heart. In spite of what Clyne says in his confession I believe she took a delight in turning No. 13 into a haunted house with her shrieking and her flitting candles. How she must have enjoyed herself when she heard the talk about the ghost!"

"I have no doubt she did, Mr. Denzil; but even those delights wearied her, and she longed to get back to the free gipsy life. When she found—through you, sir—that the police wanted to know too much about Clear's death, she left Mrs. Bensusan in the lurch, and tramped off down to the New Forest, where she picked up again with her tribe."

"How did her mistress take her desertion?"

"Very much to heart, as she had treated the young savage very kindly, and ought to have received more gratitude. Perhaps when she hears

how her adopted child wandered about at night, and ended by killing Clear, she will be glad she is dead and buried. Yet, I don't know. Women are wonderfully soft-hearted, and certainly Rhoda is thought no end of, by that fat woman."

"Well! well!" said Lucian, impatient of this digression, "so Rhoda went back to her tribe?"

"Yes, sir; and as she was sharp, clever, and, moreover, came with some money which she had stolen from Mrs. Bensusan—for she added theft to ingratitude—she was received with open arms. With her gipsy cousins she went about in the true gipsy style; but not hardened to the outdoor life in wet weather she fell ill."

"Civilisation made her delicate, I suppose," said Denzil grimly.

"Exactly; she was not fit for the tent life after having lived for so long under a comfortable roof. She fell ill with inflammation of the lungs, and in a wonderfully short space of time she died."

"When did she confess her crime?"

"I'm coming to that, sir. When she was dying she sent two gipsies to the nearest magistrate—who happened to be the vicar of the parish in which the tribe were then encamped—and asked him to see her on a matter of life and death. The vicar came at once, and when he became aware that Rhoda was the girl wanted in the Vrain case—for he had read all about her in the papers—he became very interested. He took down the confession of the wretched girl, had it signed by two witnesses and Rhoda herself, and sent it up to Scotland Yard."

"And this confession—"

"Here it is," said Link, pointing to the manuscript on the table, "but it is too long to read, so I just shall tell you briefly what Rhoda confessed, and how she committed the crime."

"Go on! I am most anxious to hear, Link."

"Well, Mr. Denzil, you know that Rhoda was in the habit of visiting No. 13 by night and amusing herself by wandering about the empty rooms, although I don't know what pleasure she found in doing so. It seems that when Clear became tenant of the house, Rhoda was very angry, as his presence interfered with her midnight capers. However, on seeing his rooms—for Clear found her one night, and took her in to show them to her—she was filled with admiration, and with true gipsy instinct wanted to steal some of the ornaments. She tried to pocket a silver paper-knife on that very night Clear was so hospitable to her, but she was not sharp enough, and the man saw the theft. In a rage at her dishonesty he turned her out of the room, and swore that he would thrash her if she came into his presence again."

"Did the threat keep Rhoda away?"

"Not it; I am sure you saw enough of that wild cat to know nothing would frighten her. She certainly did not thrust herself personally on Clear; but whenever his back was turned she took to stealing things out of his room, when he was foolish enough to leave the door open. Clear was much enraged and complained to Clyne—known to Rhoda as Wrent—who in his turn read the girl a sharp lecture."

"But having shown Clyne the cellar way into the house, Miss Rhoda knew too much, and laughed in Clyne's face. He did not dare to make her thefts public, or complain to Mrs. Bensusan, lest Rhoda should tell of the connection between him and the tenant of the Silent House, who passed under the name of Berwin. Therefore he told Clear to keep his sitting-room door locked."

"A wise precaution with that imp about," said Lucian. "I hope

Clear was sensible enough to adopt it."

"Yes and no! When he was sober he locked the door; and when drunk he left it open, and Rhoda looted at will. And now comes the more important part of the confession. You remember that Clyne left the stiletto from Berwin Manor on Clear's table?"

"Yes! with the amiable intention that the poor devil should kill himself. He left it on Christmas Eve too, the ruffian; a pleasant time for a man to commit suicide."

"Of course the intention was horrible," said Mr. Link gravely. "Some people might think such an act incredible. But I have seen so much of the worst side of human nature that I am not surprised. Clyne was too cowardly to kill the man himself, so he thought to make Clear his own executioner by leaving the stiletto in his way. Well, sir, the weapon proved to be useful in the way it was intended by Clyne; for Clear was killed with that very weapon."

"And by Rhoda!" said Lucian nodding. "I see! How did she get hold of it?"

"By accident. When Wrent—I mean Clyne—and Mrs. Bensusan went to bed on Christmas Eve, Rhoda thought she would have some of her devil dances in the haunted house; so she slipped out of bed and into the yard, and dropped down into the cellar whence she went up to Clar's rooms."

"Was Clear in bed?"

"No; but he was in his bedroom, and, according to Rhoda, furiously drunk. You know that Clyne said the man had been drinking all day. On this night he had left his sitting-room door open, and the lamp burning. On the table was the silver-handled stiletto with the ribbon; and when Rhoda peered into the room to see what she could pick up, she thought she would like this pretty

toy. She stole forward softly and took the stiletto, but before she could get back to the door, Clear, who had been watching her, reeled out and rushed at her."

"Did she run away?"

"She couldn't. Clear was between her and the door. She ran round the room upsetting everything, for she thought he would kill her in his drunken rage. Don't you remember, Mr. Denzil, how disorderly the room was? Well, Clear got Rhoda into a corner, and was going to strike her; she had the stiletto still in her hand and held it point outward to save herself from the blow. She thought when he saw the weapon he would not dare to come nearer. However, either he did not see the stiletto, or was too drunk to feel fear, for he stumbled and fell forward, so that the dagger ran right into his heart. In a moment he fell dead, before he had time, as Rhoda says, to even utter a cry."

"So it was an accident after all?" said Lucian.

"Oh, yes! quite an accident," replied Link, "and I can see very plainly how it took place. Of course Rhoda was terrified at what she had done—although she really was not to blame—and leaving the dead man, ran away with the stiletto. She dropped the ribbon off it near the cellar door as she was running away, and there Mrs. Kebby found it."

"What did she do with the stiletto?"

"She had it in her room, and when she left Mrs. Bensusan she carried it with her down the country. In proof of the truth, she gave it to the vicar who wrote down her confession, and he sent it up with the papers to Scotland Yard. Queer case, isn't it?"

"Very queer, Link. I thought everybody was guilty but Rhoda."

"Ah!" said the detective significantly, "it is always the least suspected

person who is guilty. I could have sworn that Clyne was the man. Now it seems he is innocent; so instead of hanging he will only be imprisoned for his share in the conspiracy."

"He may escape that way," said Lucian drily, "but, morally speaking, I regard him as more guilty than Rhoda."

or less importance to the young couple.

The mystery of Clear's death had been solved; Lydia had been set free as innocent of crime; her father, found guilty of conspiracy to obtain the assurance money, had been condemned to a long term of imprisonment, and, what most concerned Lucian and Diana, Mark Vrain had really and truly gone the way of all flesh.

After the conclusion of the Vrain case Lucian had become formally engaged to Diana, but it was agreed between them that the marriage should not take place for some time on account of her father's health. After his discharge as cured from the asylum of Dr. Jorce, Miss Vrain had taken her father down to his own place in the country, and there tended him with the most affectionate solicitude, in the hope that he would recover his health. But the hope was vain, for by his over-indulgence in morphia, his worrying and wandering and irregular mode of life, Vrain had completely shattered his health. He lapsed into a state of second childhood, and, being deprived of the drugs which formerly had excited him to a state of frenzy, sank into a pitiable condition. For days he would remain without speaking to anyone, and even ceased to take a pleasure in his books. Finally his limbs became paralysed, and so he spent the last few months of his wretched life in a bath-chair being wheeled round the garden.

Still his constitution was so strong that he lived for quite twelve months after his return to his home, and died unexpectedly in his sleep. Diana was not sorry when he passed so easily away, for death was a merciful release of his tortured soul from his worn-out body. So Mark Vrain died and was buried, and after the funeral Diana went abroad with Miss Priscilla Barbar for a companion.

In the meantime, Lucian stayed in

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE END OF IT ALL

Two years after the discovery of Rhoda's guilt, Mr. and Mrs. Denzil were seated in the garden of Berwin Manor. It was a perfect summer evening at the sunset hour, something like that evening when, in the same garden, almost at the same time, Lucian had asked Diana to be his wife. But between then and now twenty-four months had elapsed, and many things had taken place of more

grimy, smoky London, and worked hard at his profession. He was beginning to be known, and in time actually received a brief or two, with which he did his best in court. Still he was far from being the successful pleader he hoped to be, for law, of all professions, is one which demands time and industry for the attainment of any degree of excellence. It is rarely that a young lawyer can go to sleep and wake to find himself famous; he must crawl rather than run. With diligence and punctuality, and observance of every chance, in time the wished-for goal is reached, although that goal, in nine cases out of ten, is a very moderate distance off. Lucian did not sigh for a judgeship, or for a seat on the Woolsack; he was content to be a barrister with a good practice, and perhaps a Q.C.-ship in prospect. However, during the year of Diana's mourning he did so well that he felt justified in asking her to marry him when she returned. Diana on her side saw no obstacle to this course, so she consented.

"If you are not rich, my dear, I am," she said, when Lucian alleged his poverty as the only bar to their union, "and as money gives me no pleasure without you, I do not care to stay in Berwin Manor in lonely spinsterhood. I shall marry you whenever you choose."

And Lucian, taking advantage of this gracious permission, did choose to be married, and that speedily, so within two years after the final closing of the Vrain case they became man and wife. At the time they were seated in the garden at the hour of sunset, they had only lately returned from their honeymoon, and were now talking over their past experiences. Miss Priscilla, who had been left in charge of the Manor during their absence, had welcomed them back with much joy, as she looked upon the match as one of her own making. Now she had gone inside on the understanding that two

is company and three is none, and the young couple were left alone. Hand in hand, after the foolish fashion of lovers, they sat under a leafy oak tree, and the sunlight glowed redly on their happy faces. After a short silence Lucian looked at the face of his wife and laughed.

"What is amusing you, dear?" said Mrs. Denzil with a sympathetic smile.

"My thoughts were rather pleasant than amusing," replied Lucian, giving the hand that lay in his a squeeze, "but I was thinking of Hans Andersen's tale of the Elder Mother Tree, and of the old couple who sat enjoying their golden wedding under the linden, with the red sunlight shining on their silver crowns."

"We are under an oak and wear no crowns," replied Diana in her turn, "but we are quite as happy, I think, although it is not our golden wedding."

"Perhaps that will come some day, Diana."

"Fifty years, my dear; it's a long way off yet," said Mrs. Denzil dubiously.

"I am glad it is, for I shall have (D.V.) fifty years of happiness with you to look forward to. Upon my word, Diana, I think you deserve happiness after all the trouble you have had."

"With you I am sure to be happy, Lucian, but other people, poor souls, are not so well off."

"What other people?"

"Jabez Clyne for one!"

"My dear," said Lucian seriously, "I hope I am not a hard man, but I really cannot find it in my heart to pity Clyne. He was—and I daresay is—a scoundrel."

"I don't deny that he acted badly," sighed Diana, "but it was for his daughter's sake you know."

"There is a limit even to paternal

affection, Diana. And putting aside the wickedness of the whole conspiracy, I cannot pardon a man who deliberately put a weapon in the way of a man almost insane with drink in order that he might kill himself. The idea was diabolically wicked my dear, and I think that Jabez Clyne, alias Wrent, quite deserves the long imprisonment he received."

"At all events the Sirius Company got back their money, Lucian."

"So much as Lydia had not spent they got back, Diana, but when your father actually died they had to part with it very soon again, and some of it has gone into Lydia's pocket after all."

Diana blushed. "It was only right, dear," she said apologetically. "When my father made his new will, leaving it all to me, I did not think that Lydia, however badly she treated him, should be left absolutely penniless. And you know, Lucian, you agreed that I should share the assurance money with her."

"I did," replied Denzil. "Of two evils I chose the least, for if Lydia had not got a portion of the money, she would have been quite capable of trying to upset the second will on the ground that Mr. Vrain was insane."

"Papa was not insane," reproved Diana. "He was weak, I admit, but at the time he made that will he had all his senses. Besides, after all the scandal of the case I don't think Lydia would have dared to go to law about it. Still it was best to give her the money, and I hear from Miss Priscilla that Lydia is now in Italy and proposes to marry an Italian prince."

"She has flown higher than a count, then. Poor Ferruci killed himself for her sake."

"For his own rather," exclaimed Mrs. Denzil energetically. "He knew that if he lived he would be punished

by imprisonment, so chose to kill himself rather than suffer such dis-honour. I believe he truly loved Lydia certainly, but as he wanted the assurance money, I fancy he sinned quite as much for his own sake as for Lydia's."

"No doubt, and I daresay Lydia loved him after her own fashion, yet she seems to have forgotten him pretty soon, and—as you say—intends to marry a prince. I don't envy his Highness."

"She has no heart, so I daresay she will be happy as such women ever are," said Diana contemptuously, "yet her happiness comes out of much evil. If she had not married my father, her own would not now be in prison, nor would Count Ferruci and Rhoda be dead."

"Ferruci perhaps might still be alive and her husband," assented Lucian, "but I have my doubts about Rhoda. She was a wicked, precocious little imp that girl, and sooner or later would have come to a bad end. The death of Clear was due to an accident though, I admit. But Rhoda has still one person who laments over her, for, although Mrs. Bensusan knows the truth, she always thinks of that red-haired minx as a kind of martyr, who was led into wicked ways by Clyne, alias Wrent."

"I am sure Mrs. Clear doesn't think so!"

"Mrs. Clear has got quite enough to think about in remembering how narrowly she escaped imprisonment for her share in that shameful conspiracy. If she had not turned Queen's evidence, she would have been punished as Clyne was; as it is, she just escaped by an accident. Still, if it had not been for her, we should never have discovered the truth. I would never have suspected Clyne, who was always so meek and mild. Even that visit he paid to me in order to lament over his daughter's probable marriage to Ferruci was

a trick to find out how much I knew."

"Don't you think he hated Ferruci?"

"No, I am sure he did not; he acted a part to find out what I was doing. If Mrs. Clear had not betrayed him, we should never have discovered the conspiracy."

"And if Rhoda had not spoken, the mystery of Clear's death would never have been solved," said Diana, "although she only confessed at the eleventh hour and when she was dying."

"I think Link was pleased that the mystery was solved in so unexpected a way," said Lucian laughing. "He never forgave my finding out so much without his aid. He ascribes the ending of the whole matter to chance; and I daresay he is right."

"H'm!" said Mrs. Denzil, who had no great love for the detective, "he certainly left everything he could to chance. Twice he gave up the case."

"And twice I gave it up," said Denzil; "if it had not been for you, dear, I should never have gone on with what seemed to be a hopeless task. But when I first met you, you induced me to continue the search for the culprit, and again when by the evidence of the missing finger you did not believe your father was dead."

"Well, you worked; I worked; Link worked," said Diana philosophically; "and we all three did our best to discover the truth."

"Only to let chance discover it in the long run."

Diana laughed and nodded, but did not contradict her husband. "Well, my dear," she said, "I think we have discussed the subject pretty freely, but there is one thing I should like to know. What about the Silent House in Pimlico?"

"Oh, Miss Greeb told me the other day that Peacock is going to pull it down. You know just before we were married I took leave of Miss Greeb, with whom I lodged for a long time. Well, she gave me a piece of news. She is going to be married also, and to whom do you think?"

"I don't know," said Diana, looking interested, as women always do in marriage news.

"To Peacock, who owns nearly all the property in and about Geneva Square. It will be a splendid match for her, and Mrs. Peacock will be much richer than you or I, Diana."

"But not happier, my dear. I am glad she is to be married, as she seemed a nice woman and made you very comfortable. But why is the Silent House to be pulled down?"

"Because no one will live in it."

"But it is not haunted now. You know it was discovered that Rhoda was the ghost, and the ghost, as Miss Greeb suggested, killed Clear."

"It is haunted now by the ghost of Clear," said Lucian gravely. "At all events he was murdered there, and no one cares to live in the house. I confess I shouldn't care to live in it myself. So Peacock, finding the house unprofitable, has determined to pull it down."

"So there is an end to the Silent House of Pimlico," said Diana, rising and taking her husband's arm. "Come inside, Lucian. It grows chilly."

"Tho' winds be cold and nights be drear,
Yet love makes warm our hearts, my
dear,"

quoted Lucian as they went up to the house. "That is not very good poetry, but it is a beautiful truth, my love."

Diana laughed and looked up proudly into the bright face of her husband.

So they went inside, and found that Miss Priscilla had made the tea,

and were all very happy and very thankful for their happiness. In this condition, which is sufficiently pleasant, I think we may leave them.

THE END





